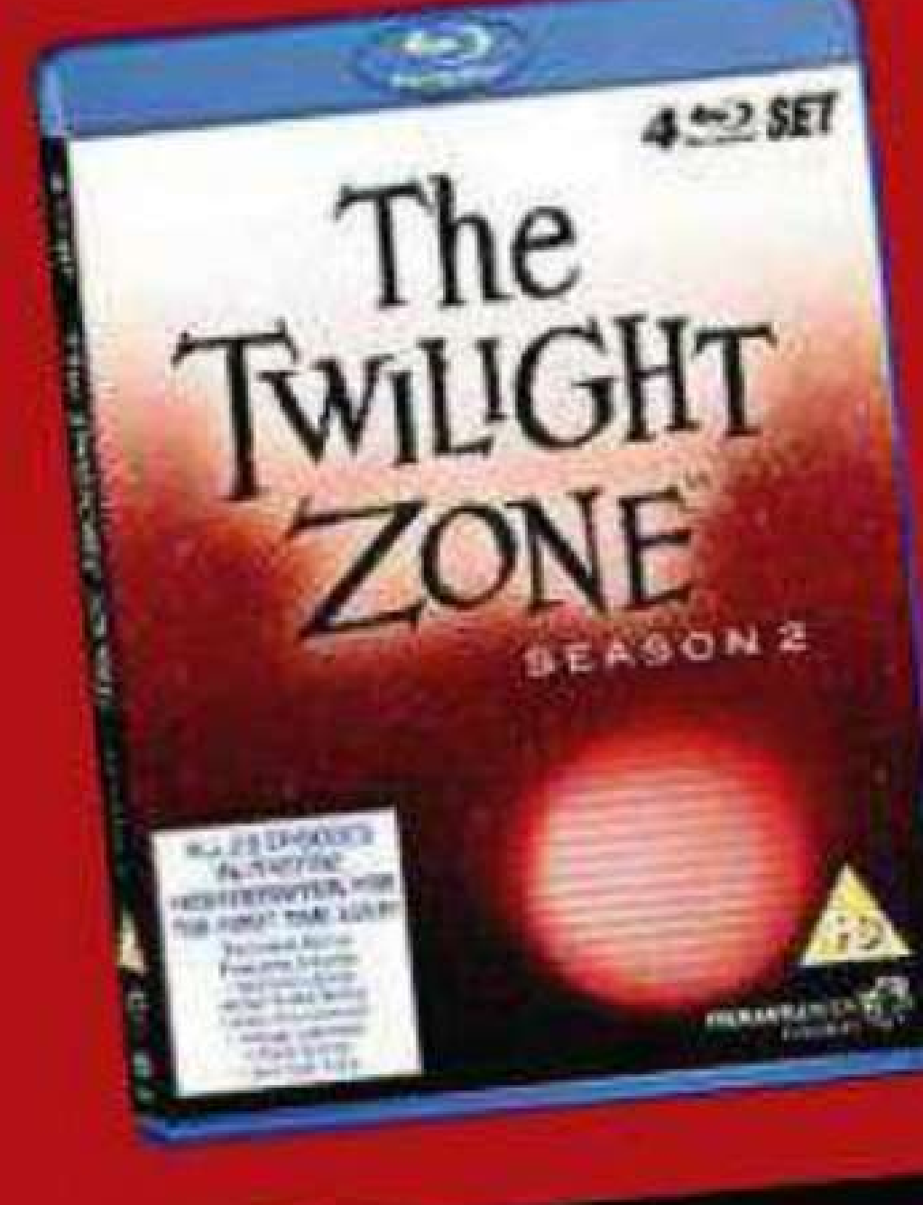

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THE MYSTERY OF THE COSMATI PAVEMENT

MORNING OF THE MUTANTS
JACK KIRBY AND THE REAL ORIGIN OF THE X-MEN

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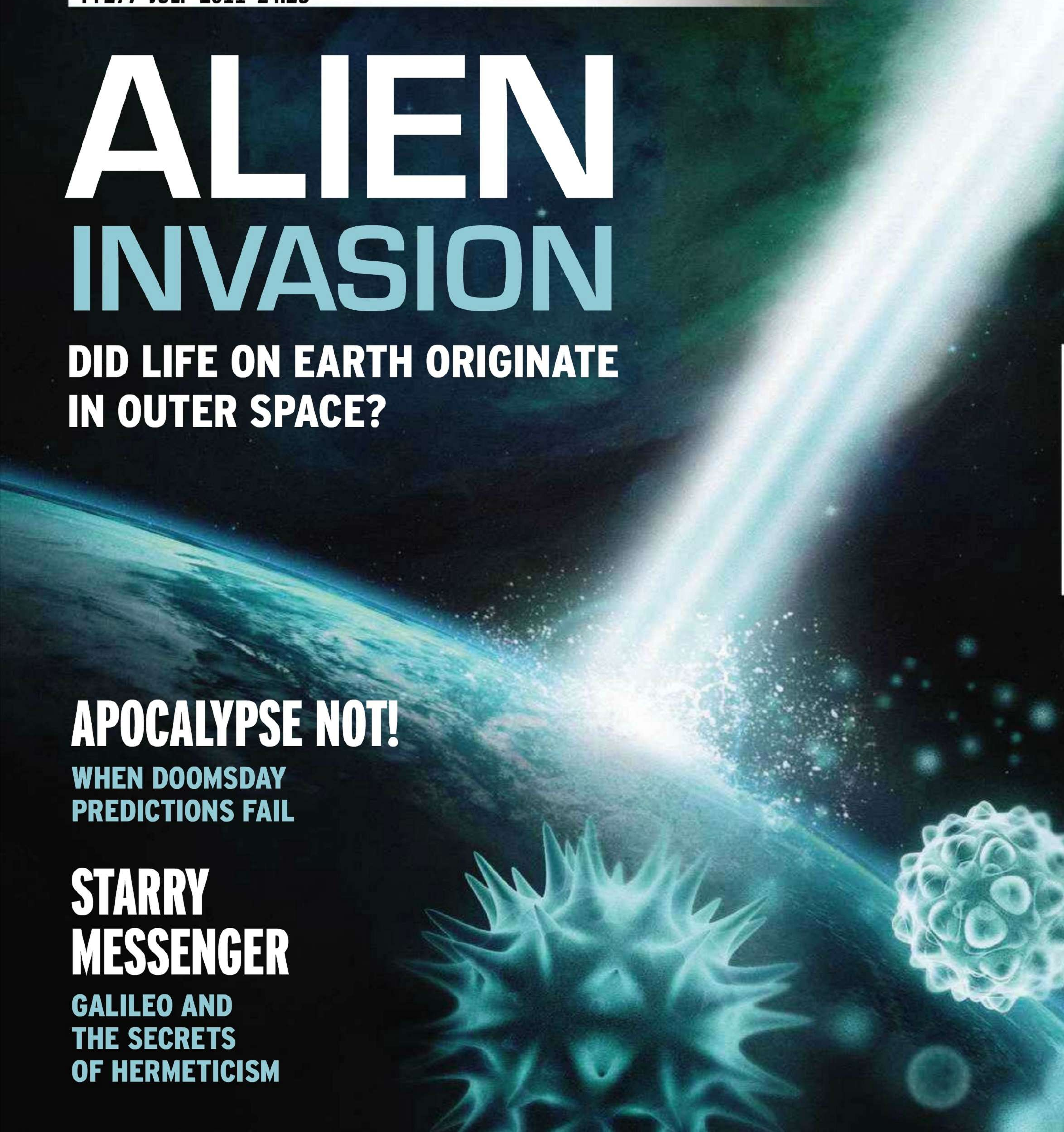

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DID LIFE ON EARTH ORIGINATE IN OUTER SPACE?

APOCALYPSE NOT!

WHEN DOOMSDAY PREDICTIONS FAIL

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THE INTERSTELLAR ORIGIN OF LIFE

Conservative scientists tend to shy away from the idea that extraterrestrial life has anything to do with our own life on Earth, and the establishment fences the subject with demands for extraordinary levels of evidence, while ignoring data that is already to hand. But alien life is everywhere in the Cosmos – even on the Earth – if we know how to spot it, says **PROFESSOR CHANDRA WICKRAMASINGHE.**

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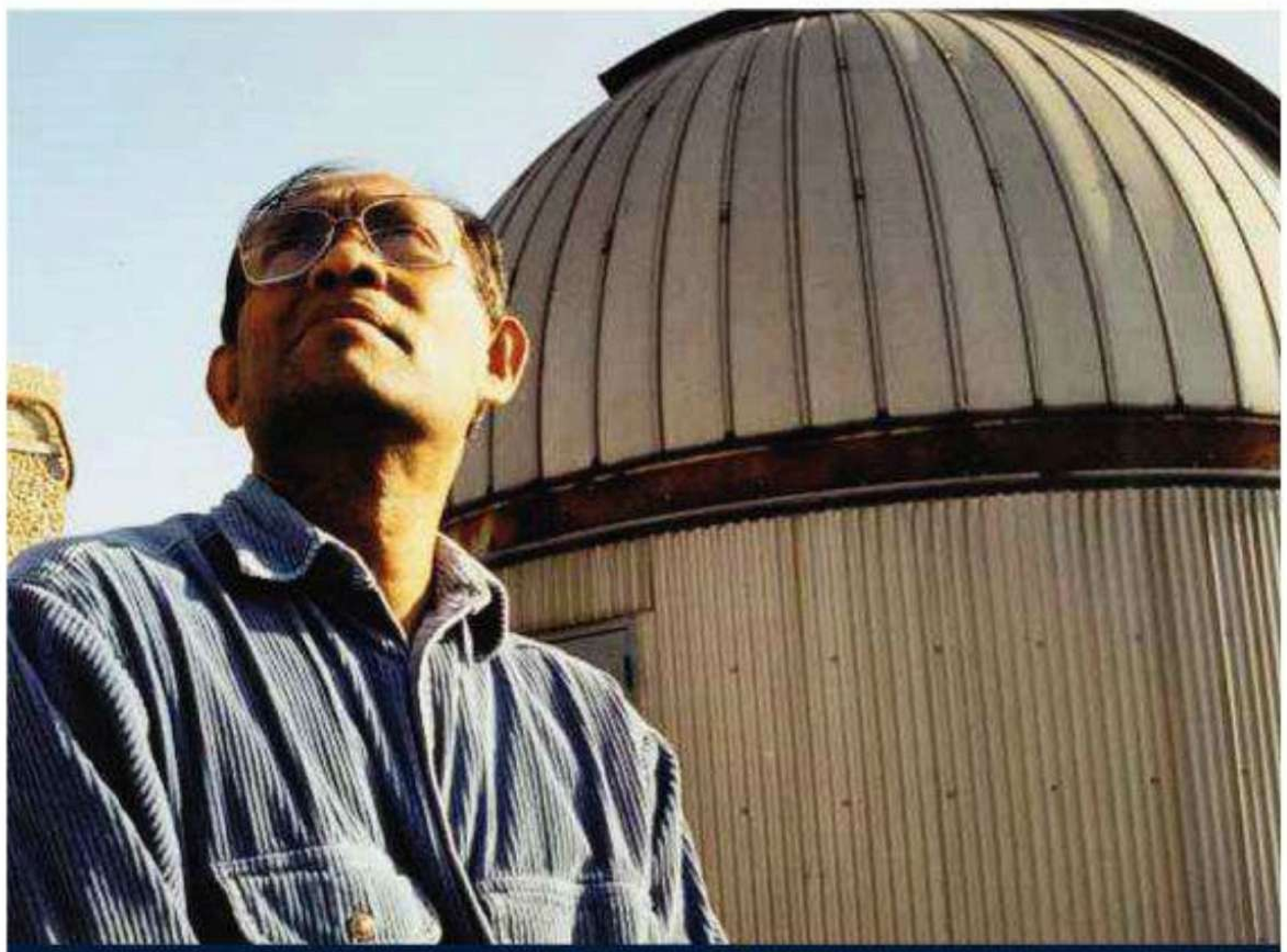
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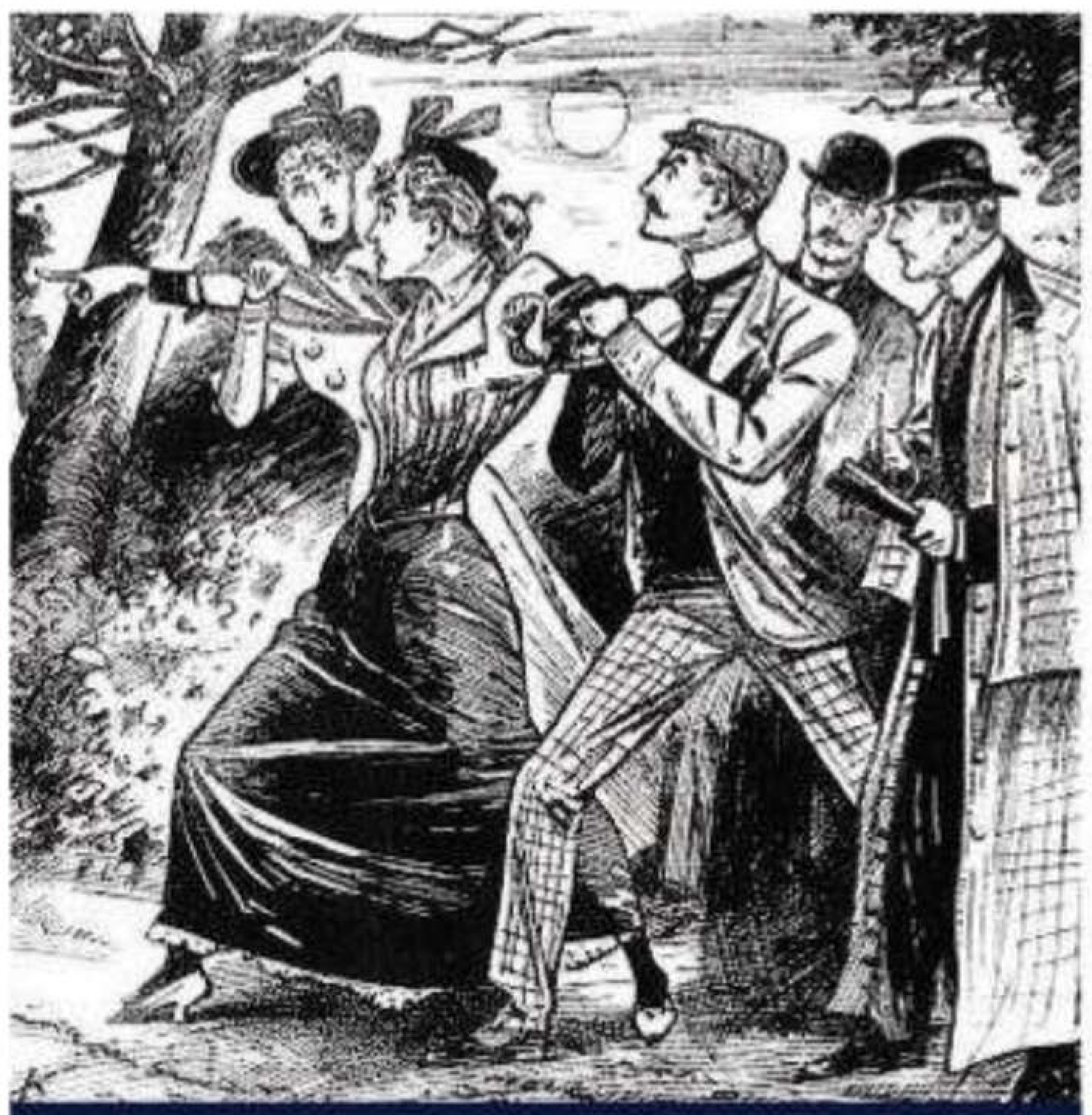
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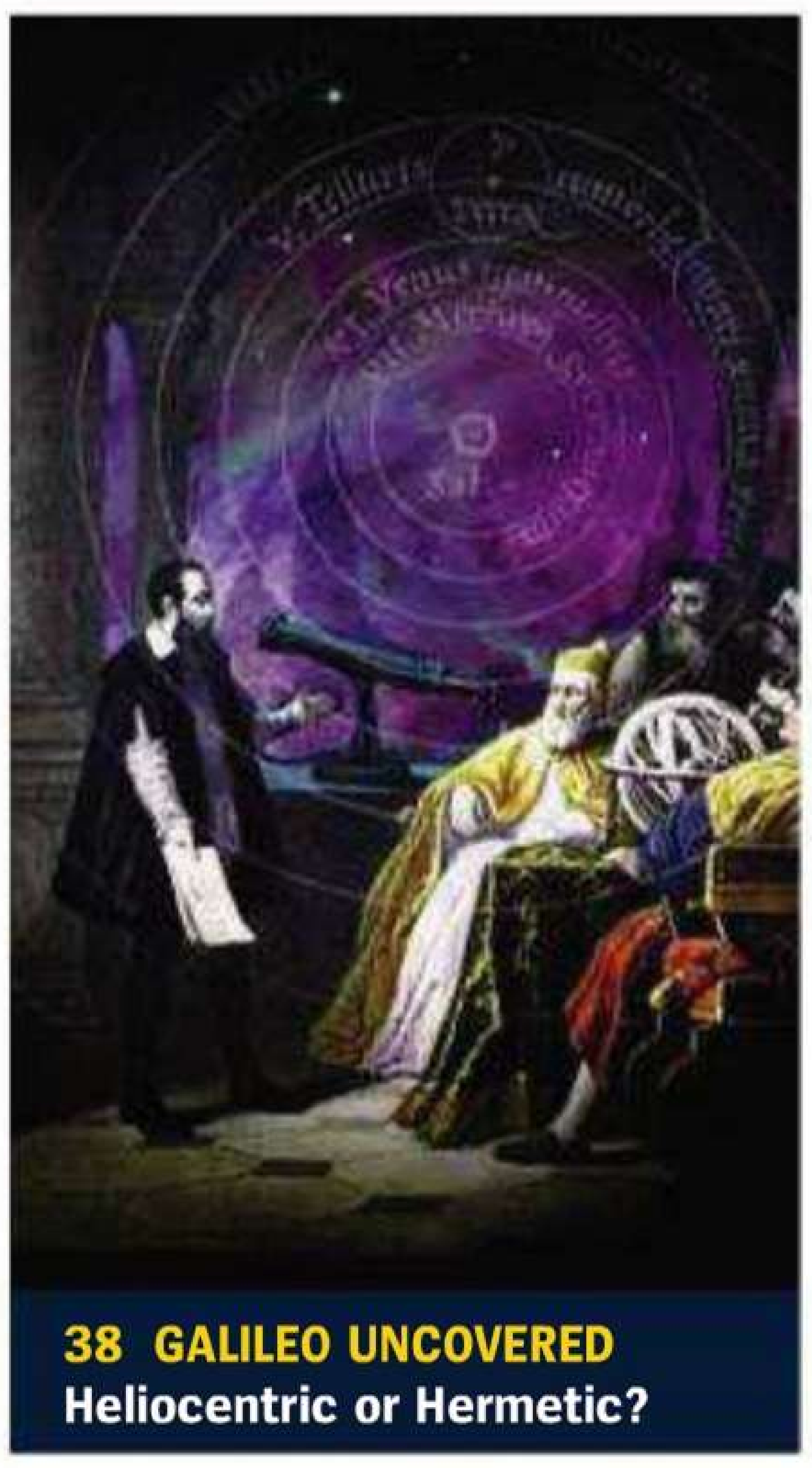
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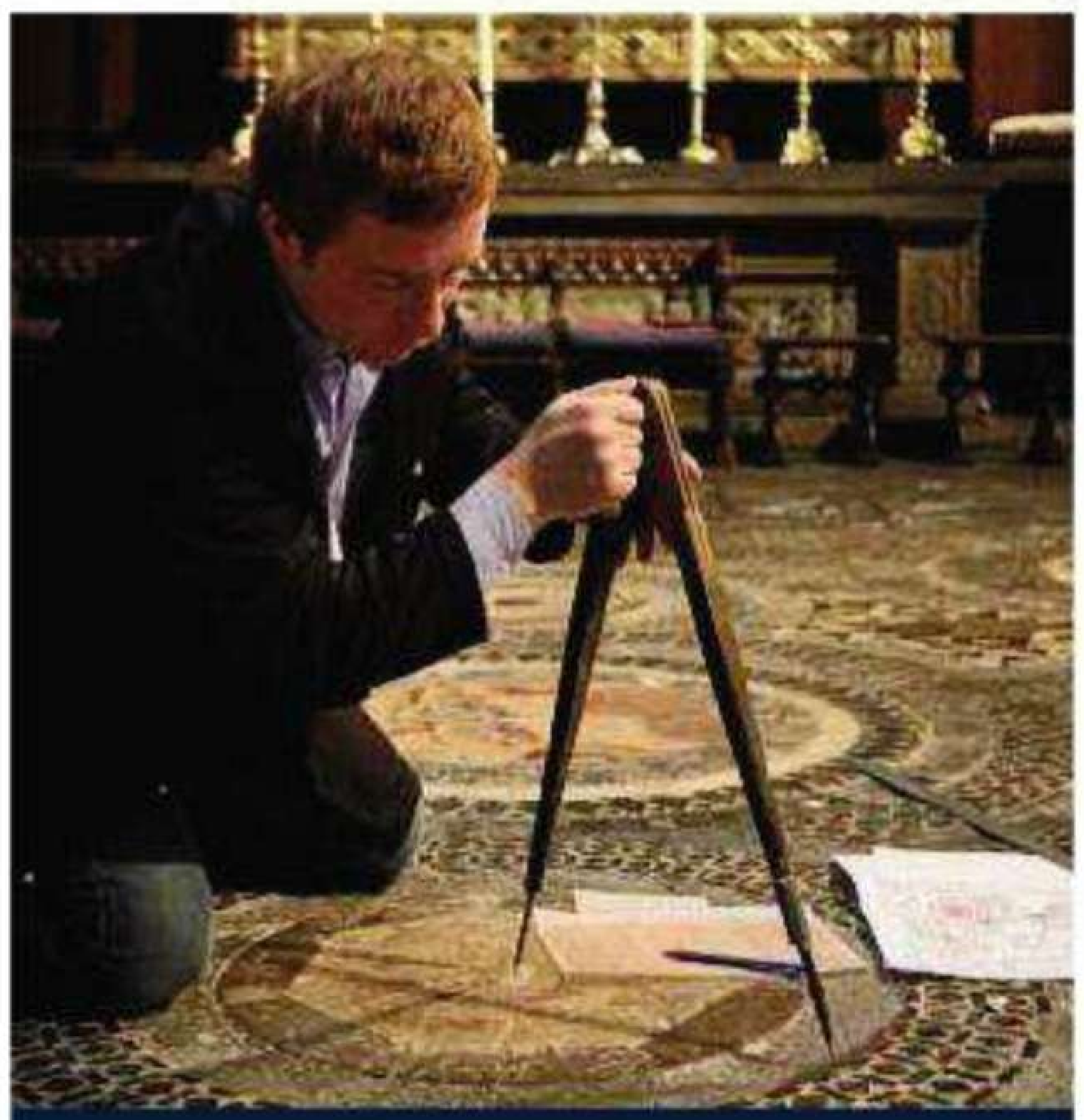
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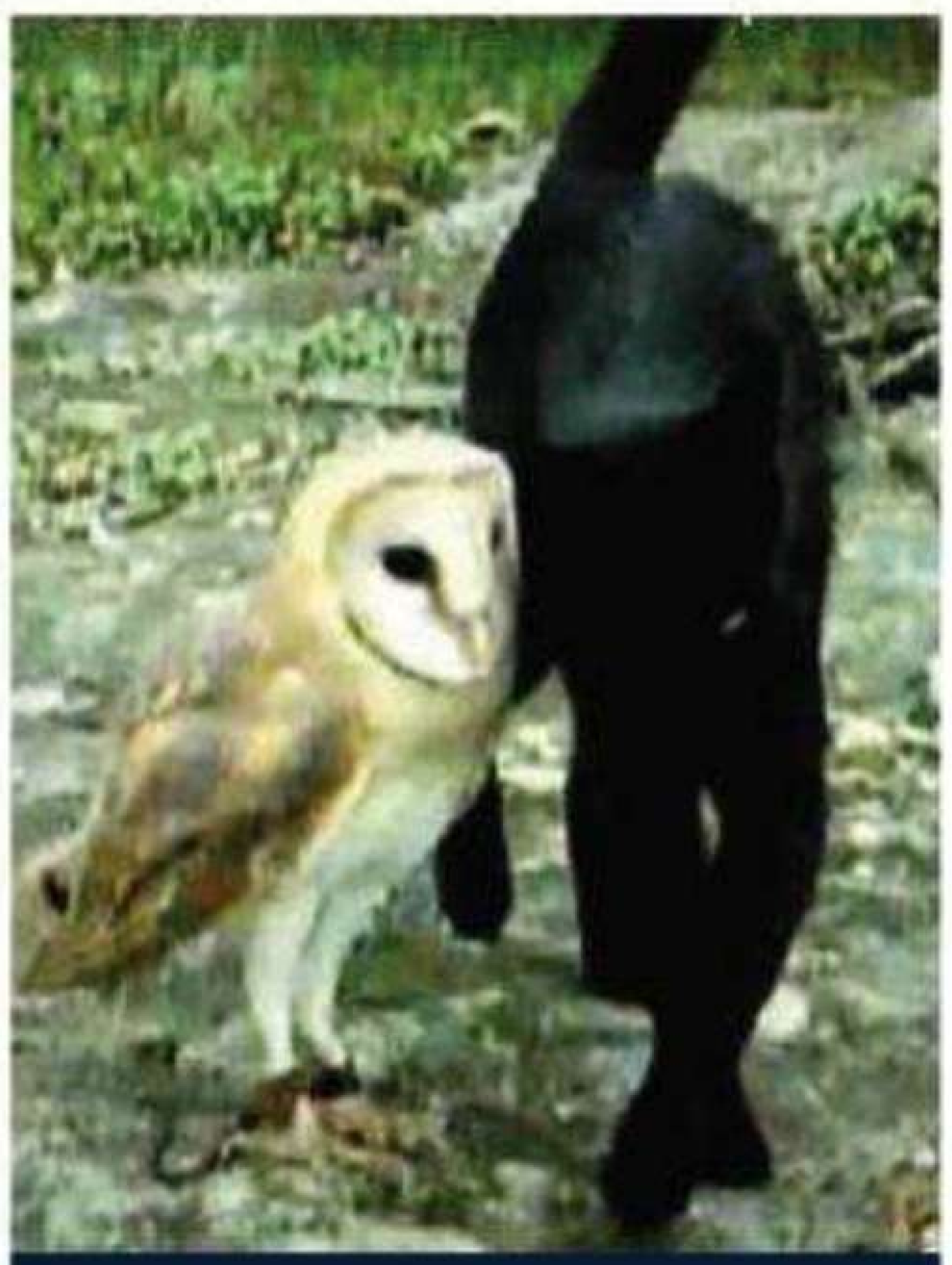
Westminster Abbey's most mysterious artwork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MAIN COVER IMAGE: ETIENNE GILFILLAN AND ALEX TOMLINSON
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Westminster Abbey Cosmati pavement: GETTY IMAGES / PETER MACDIARMID

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editorial

The real alien invasion

Panspermia

The origin of life on Earth is a topic which can provoke serious disagreement everywhere from scientific forums to discussions in the pub. In this issue, we take a look at the controversial theory of 'panspermia', courtesy of one its major proponents, the astrobiologist Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe, who, with the late Sir Fred Hoyle, has argued that there is a steady 'injection' of biotic material into Earth's atmosphere from space, transported by debris from comets, asteroids and meteorites. It's a hypothesis that can be dated back to Anaxagoras, the 5th century BC Greek philosopher, but only the development of modern astrobiology has allowed it to become a subject for scientific investigation – if still a hotly debated one.

In his article on pp32–37, Prof. Wickramasinghe addresses the commonly held argument that viable living material is too fragile to survive the extreme forces involved in being transported through interstellar space or the violence of atmospheric entry. The controversial discovery of fossil biotic ingredients on a meteorite from Mars is just one of the clues to the fact that the survival of intact living organisms is perhaps not a requirement; it is only necessary for a very small fragment, carrying genetic information that can be reconstituted, to kick-start a new chain of life.

Prof. Wickramasinghe further supports the hypothesis that life on Earth was seeded from space with a review of the astronomical evidence of biotic elements brought here by comets or asteroids moving through regions of suitably latent material – material which may even have been present and incorporated when planets were formed. Besides these ancient interstellar clouds of biotic detritus, the Universe may contain planets thus seeded, whose own evolved and changed material may have been blasted back into space as a further contribution to the interstellar fields of pre-life. It's a process that could have happened many times. Of course, the panspermia hypothesis only defers the more philosophical question of the ultimate origin of life, and it doesn't rule out that life may have appeared more than once – and that there could be life-forms on other worlds to which we are genetically related.

If the hypothesis is correct, Wickramasinghe and Hoyle proposed, the Earth must be subject to a *continual* injection of biotic elements from space – an ongoing alien invasion that might be responsible for pandemic outbreaks of new diseases as well as a source of new genetic material that further randomises evolutionary development. The idea that comets and meteorite arrivals may trigger pandemics of influenza, bubonic plague and smallpox remains, of course, a subject of vigorous contention.

Since Sir Fred's death in 2001 [**FT154:26–27**], Prof. Wickramasinghe has continued refining the theory and includes here the latest studies of 'red rains' – one of Fort's topics – that recently occurred in the Kerala region of India (**FT209:16**; **212:16**), concluding that they are convincing proof that biotic elements are still arriving on Earth from space.

Dream conference: call for papers

A two-day conference on *Dreams in Legend and Tradition* will be held on Saturday–Sunday 3–4 September 2011 as the sixth Legendary Weekend of the Folklore Society in the Assembly Rooms in Swaffham, Norfolk. These weekends are friendly, popular and stimulating events, and the society would like to hear from anyone who can attend and present a paper. Presentations, which should be 20 minutes long, can take the form of talks, performances, or DVD. If you would like to attend or to present a paper or performance, please contact: Jeremy Harte, Bourne Hall, Spring Street, Ewell, Surrey KT17 1UF, 020 8394 1734, JHarte@epsom-ewell.gov.uk.

Errata

Francis Gandon spotted an error (**FT275:23**) in a quotation from Henry IV, "which should have been 'Paris vaut bien une messe' (Paris is worth a Mass), and not 'Paris vaut bien une masse', which means approximatively 'Paris is worth a shapeless block'. Which is absurd." Quite.

A review of the book *Temple Antiquities* (**FT275:59**) carried the initials 'JR'. We're not sure to whom these were meant to refer (perhaps the once-famous villain played by Larry Hagman in *Dallas*?). The review was in fact by 'BR', our own Bob Rickard.

Fortean Times job opportunity

A junior editorial position is likely to arise on *Fortean Times* later this year. We will be looking to recruit a person, or persons, with experience in the areas of web content management, picture research or both. Applicants should be well-organised, enjoy working as part of a small team, and possess plenty of initiative and common sense. Demonstrable writing skills would be an advantage, as would an interest in the subject areas covered by *FT*. Please send CVs with covering letters to: The Editor, Fortean Times, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD or by email to david_sutton@dennis.co.uk by 11 July 2011.

DAVID SUTTON

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Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

“A demented, black humour-tinged slice of backwoods horror”

★★★★ Bizarre

ICON
THE PACK
THE PACK
They will feed
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DVD VIDEO

They will feed..

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ICON

A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

Magic and persuasion

Supernatural powers in the political world and hypnotic influence used in bank robberies

Close allies of Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, have been accused of using supernatural powers to further his policies amid an increasingly bitter power struggle between him and the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Several people said to be close to the president and his chief of staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, were arrested at the beginning of May and charged with being "magicians" and invoking *djinn*. Ayandeh, an Iranian news website, described one of the arrested men, Abbas Ghaffari, as "a man with special skills in metaphysics and connections with the unknown worlds".

The Ahmadinejad-Khamenei feud took a metaphysical turn following the release of an Iranian documentary alleging the imminent return of the Hidden Imam – the revered saviour of Shia Islam, whose reappearance is anticipated by believers in a manner comparable to that with which Christian fundamentalists anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus. Conservative clerics, who say that the Imam's return cannot be predicted, have accused a "deviant current" within the president's inner circle, including Mashaei, of being responsible for the film. Ahmadinejad's obsession with the Hidden Imam is well known. He often refers to him in his speeches and in 2009 said that he had documentary evidence that the US was trying to prevent the Imam's return. *Guardian, 5 May 2011.*

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / ATTA KENARE

LEFT: President Ahmadinejad orates in front of a poster of Ayatollah Khamenei.

FACING: The "evil hypnotist" bank-robber with one of his victims.

Muhammad ibn al-Hasan – known as the 'expected one,' (*al-Muntazar*), the 'promised one' (*al-Mahdi'*), or the 'hidden one,' (*al-Mustatir*) – is the final Imam of the Twelve Imams. By tradition, he was born in Samarra (in modern-day Iraq) in AH 255 (AD 869), succeeded the Eleventh Imam in AH 270 and "disappeared" in AH 274. The so-called "Twelve Shia" believe he didn't die but was rather hidden by God (referred to as the *ghayba*, or occultation). He will return at the head of the forces of righteousness and – along with Isa (Jesus Christ) – defeat the forces of evil in one final apocalyptic battle. He will then rule the world for several years under a perfect government and bring about a perfect spirituality before the Final Judgement and the end of history. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Ayatollah Khomeini explained in a series of speeches that he was not the Hidden Imam, but had come to prepare the way for his appearance. The IRI (Islamic Republic of Iran) is in fact an eschatological construct based on the Hidden Imam.

Ahmadinejad's supporters are said to have 'special skills'

- Politicians in Kyrgyzstan ritually slaughtered seven sheep in parliament around 21 April to exorcise "evil spirits" from the chamber, following a string of violent incidents. The sheep were killed in the Zhogorku Kenesh building in the capital, Bishkek. Earlier in April, politicians arranged an armed showdown in a row over corruption. Police seized 10 handguns and an AK-47 in the building. Kurmanbak Bakiyek was ousted as president in a bloody revolution last year. *D.Telegraph, 22 April 2011.*

- Also in April, police in Stavropol, Russia, were hunting an "evil hypnotist" who had sent at least eight elderly bank customers into trances before stealing their money. "He approaches them before they go to the counter and hypnotises them into withdrawing every penny," said police spokesman Andrei Tolstoy. Victim Mayra Sovic said: "I remember this man coming up to me and saying he

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Russian walkers claim a dramatic discovery
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COLLECTING BUG BITES
Spoons, pencil sharpeners, plastic women – all have allure
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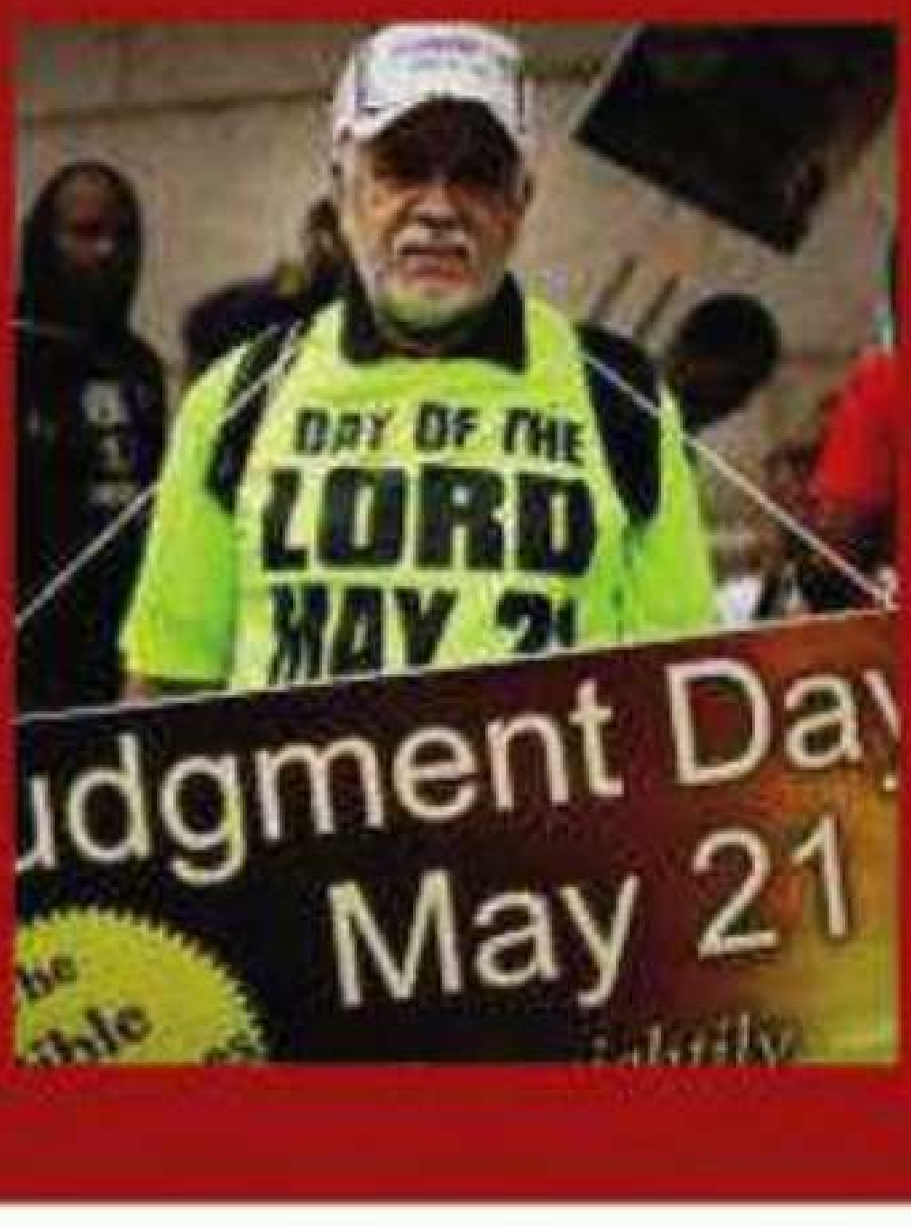

DAY OF THE LORD MAY 21
Judgment Day May 21

IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD
Doomsday prediction fails to come true
PAGE 26

desperately needed money and I would help him. The next day my bank manager told me I had withdrawn my life savings." *Metro, 14 April 2011.*

EUROPICS / CEN

● A few months ago, Galina Korzhova hypnotised a bank teller in the southern Russian town of Volzhky into handing over more than £50,000. She was suspected of having robbed up to 30 banks in what the Russian media called a "grand tour" around the country. "She met [the bank teller] in the street, saying she would remove curses and help sick relatives," said Anton Kornoukhov, a spokesman for the police in the city of Volgograd, who arrested her in December 2009. She then instructed the teller to put the money in a plastic bag and pass it to her outside Sberbank (the state bank) on Communist Street. The teller only realised what she had done a couple of hours later and told her bosses.

Earlier in 2009, a gang of hypnotists led by a Rasputin look-alike had been robbing Russian supermarkets after putting checkout girls into a trance. "All I remember is speaking to this weird-looking guy with piercing eyes," said one girl. In October, Moscow police arrested three Iranian men, after which *FT* has seen no news.

There is a well-known tale of a Russian bank teller being hypnotised on Stalin's orders by Wolfgang Messing, a celebrated Jewish psychic who escaped to the Soviet Union from Nazi-occupied Poland. The teller handed over 100,000 roubles, which was later returned. The teller had a (non-fatal) heart attack when he realised that he had been tricked. For more on the fascinating Messing, see *Psychic Discoveries: the Iron Curtain Lifted* by Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder (Souvenir, 1997), pp38–52. For other examples of theft by hypnotism, see **FT50:21, 60:12, 72:9, 79:48, 93:10, 98:8, 120:7, 126:9, 139:8, 155:20, 176:28, 201:20, 235:9.** *Sun, 20 Oct; globalpost.com, 14 Dec 2009.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Cat ordered to do jury service

D.Telegraph, 17 Jan 2011.

Girls' schools still offering 'something special' – head

Gloucester Echo, 2 Feb 2011.

Couple amazed by monster cabbage

Halifax Eve. Courier, 15 Sept 2010.

Dead man shoved up nose

MX News (Sydney), 20 Jan 2011.

Sanctions against lecturer in bat sex case lifted by court

Irish Times, 2 Dec 2010.

Lions help to rebuild school after 'quake

(Bristol) Eve. Post, 18 Jan 2011.

Jail for man who smuggled skunk into prison

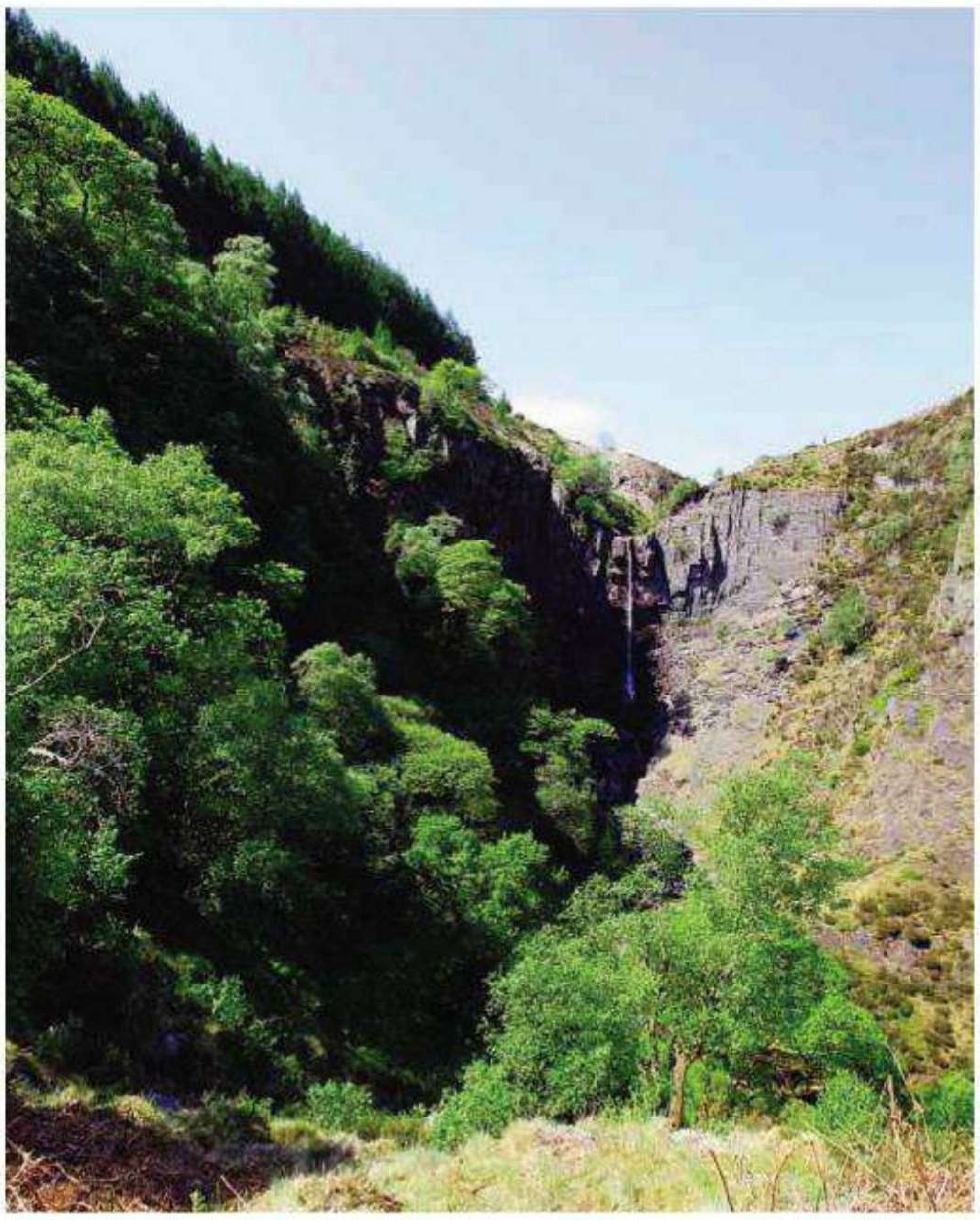
North West Eve. Mail, 15 Jan 2011.

Terrible hairy fly rediscovered

Telegraph.co.uk, 8 Dec 2010.

LUCKY ESCAPES

Motorists plunge down vertical slopes but escape without serious harm, a bridge collapses under a crane, plus a plane on a wire...



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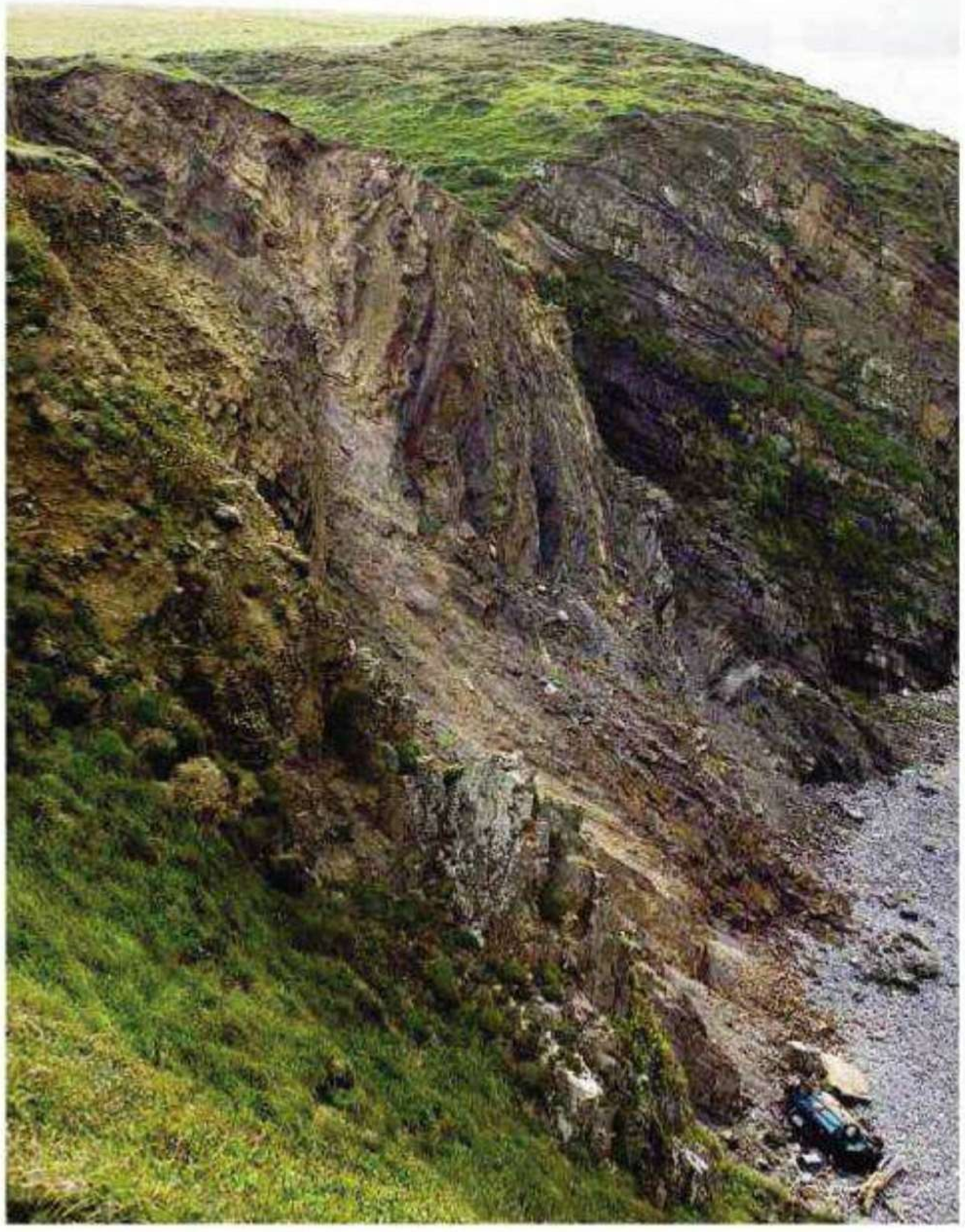
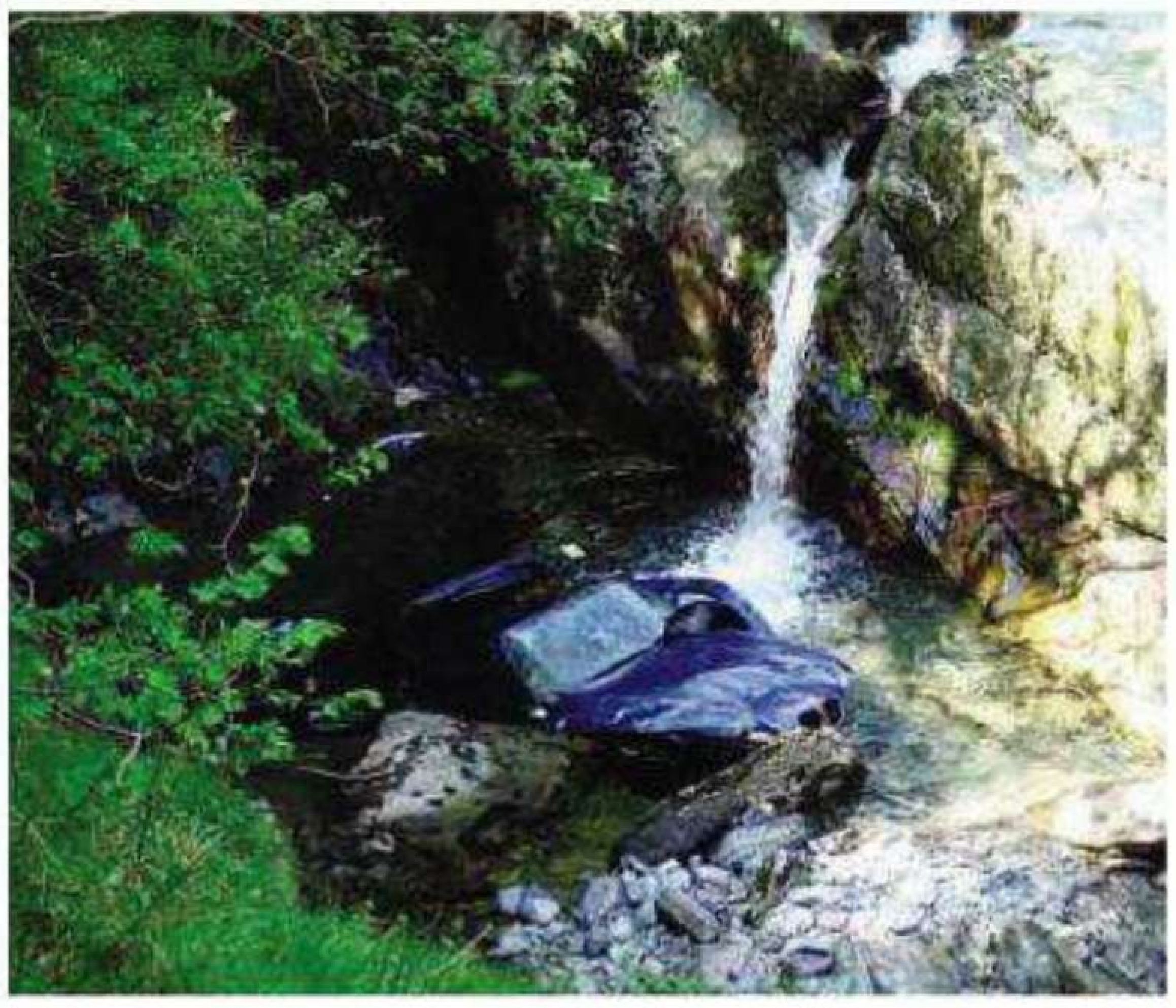


APEX NEWS AND PICTURES / ROB TIBBLES

ABOVE LEFT AND BELOW: Mr and Mrs Bradley survived when their car fell 300ft down a ravine. **ABOVE RIGHT:** This car tumbled over a 200ft Devon cliff in 2009.



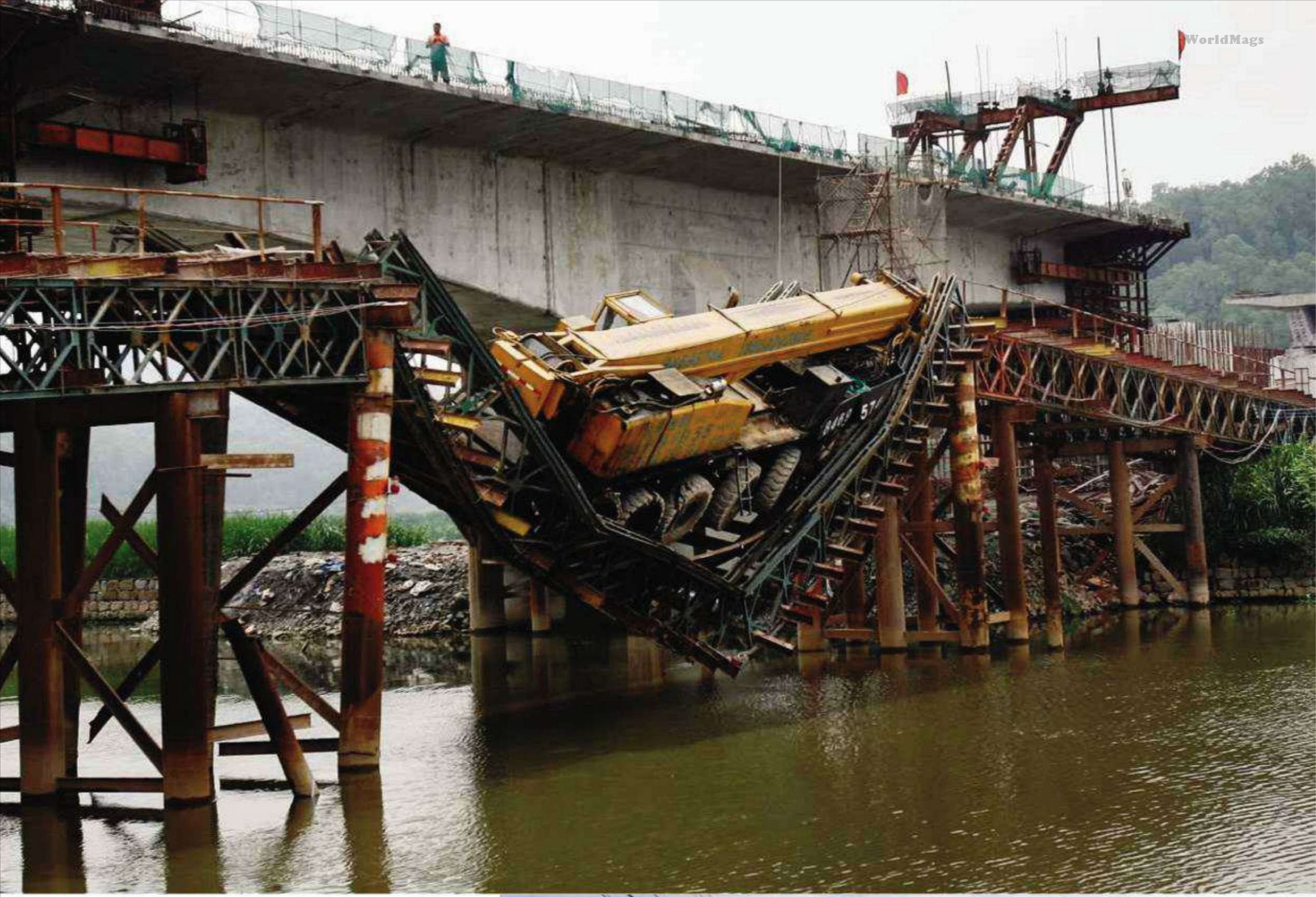
ATHENA / D LEGAKIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Bill and Dot Bradley, both 58, cheated death on 23 May 2010 when their open-top sports car plunged 300ft (90m) into a ravine. Mr Bradley, from Ludlow, Shropshire, was driving on a mountain road between Machynlleth and Llanidloes in Powys, Mid-Wales, when a blown tyre spun the BMW Z3 out of control. It clipped a parked car, sending it into a 50mph (80km/h) corkscrew over the barrier.

"Everything seemed to happen in such slow motion," said Mr Bradley. "My whole life flashed through my head not just once but twice. The side of the ravine was vertical but our fall was broken by an oak tree. We smashed off a rock and it flipped us. The car spun 90 degrees so we were falling nose down. I remember grabbing Dot's hand and saying to her, 'Sorry, darling, I don't think we're going to survive this.' But she was already unconscious. I thought that might be a blessing because it was so awful. I remember seeing a beautiful waterfall, only to land with a huge crash on a rock. We hit another tree before landing in the water with the bonnet poking out of the river. I couldn't believe I was still alive."

The car, which had landed upright in deep water, started to sink; despite a head injury and broken collarbone, Mr Bradley dragged his wife out of the river and gave her the kiss of life. "I thought I'd lost her, but then she came to," he said. "I held her tighter than I've ever held her, sobbing and thanking God we were alive." They were winched to safety when friends who had been driving with them in convoy raised the alarm. Mrs Bradley suffered cuts and bruises. Mark Jones of Brecon Mountain Rescue team said he expected to find dead bodies. "They landed in just the right place – six feet [1.8m] either way and they would not have survived," he said. "If you saw it in a film you would think it was far-fetched... In 25 years in mountain rescue, I have never seen anything like this." *D.Mirror, 24 May; County Times (Welshpool), 27 May; Sun, 11 June 2010*.

A driver "miraculously" escaped death after his car plunged over a 200ft (60m) cliff at Hartland Quay in north Devon at about 5am on 6 September 2009. A rescue helicopter was scrambled along with an ambulance as two Coastguard cliff rescuers were lowered on a line to the blue Ford Focus, which was upside down on the beach below. The unnamed driver was conscious and managed to speak to his rescuers before being airlifted to North Devon District Hospital with head and leg injuries. It was unclear if he had driven over the cliff deliberately. *[PA] Independent, D.Mirror, 7 Sept 2009*.



BRIDGE COLLAPSE

An unnamed crane driver in Guangzhou, China, spent half an hour trapped inside his cab and stranded over a river after a steel bridge collapsed under his 70-ton vehicle (above). Rescue teams finally reached him and he was freed without injury. *World Entertainment News Network, 2 June 2009*.

PHOTO: WENN.COM

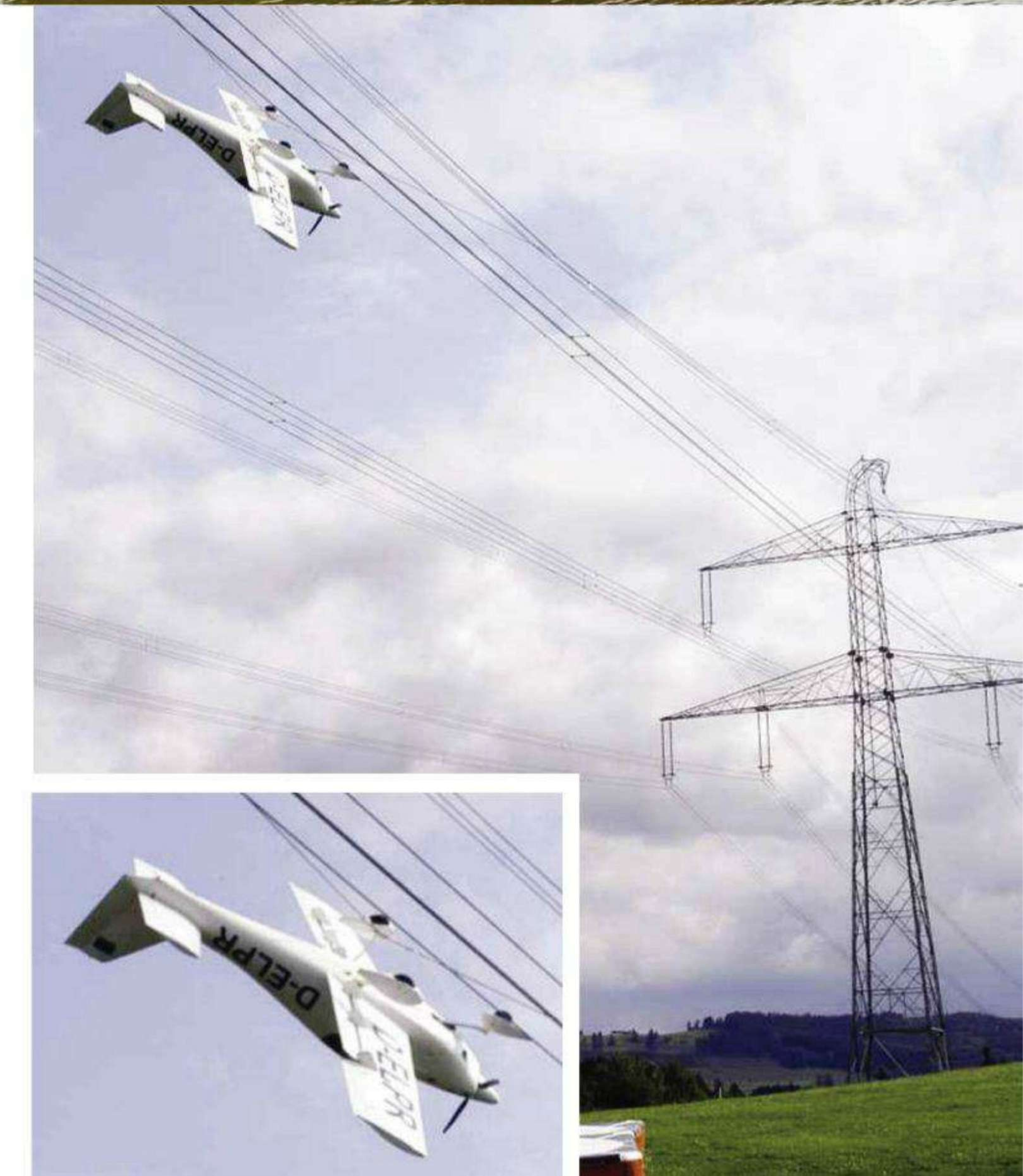
BY A WHEEL AND A PRAYER

This light aircraft (right) was left hanging upside down from a 380,000-volt power line – held only by a single wheel – for nearly three hours after the pilot misjudged his landing approach and clipped the high-tension cables.

Emergency workers near the southern German town of Durach feared that strengthening gusts of wind could free the plane and dash it to the ground 20m (66ft) below. Fuel was leaking fast and a helicopter rescue was deemed too risky as the rotor blades' downdraft could easily have released the wheel and doomed the plane's occupants.

According to a police spokesman, the German couple inside stayed in radio contact throughout this tense situation, their psychological condition deteriorating as time passed. A hydraulic lift was eventually used to save the pair, who received treatment at a nearby hospital for shock and minor injuries. *Sydney Morning Herald, 19 Aug 2008*.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES / AFP / KLAUS SCHLOSSER



SIDELINES...

CURSE INVOKED

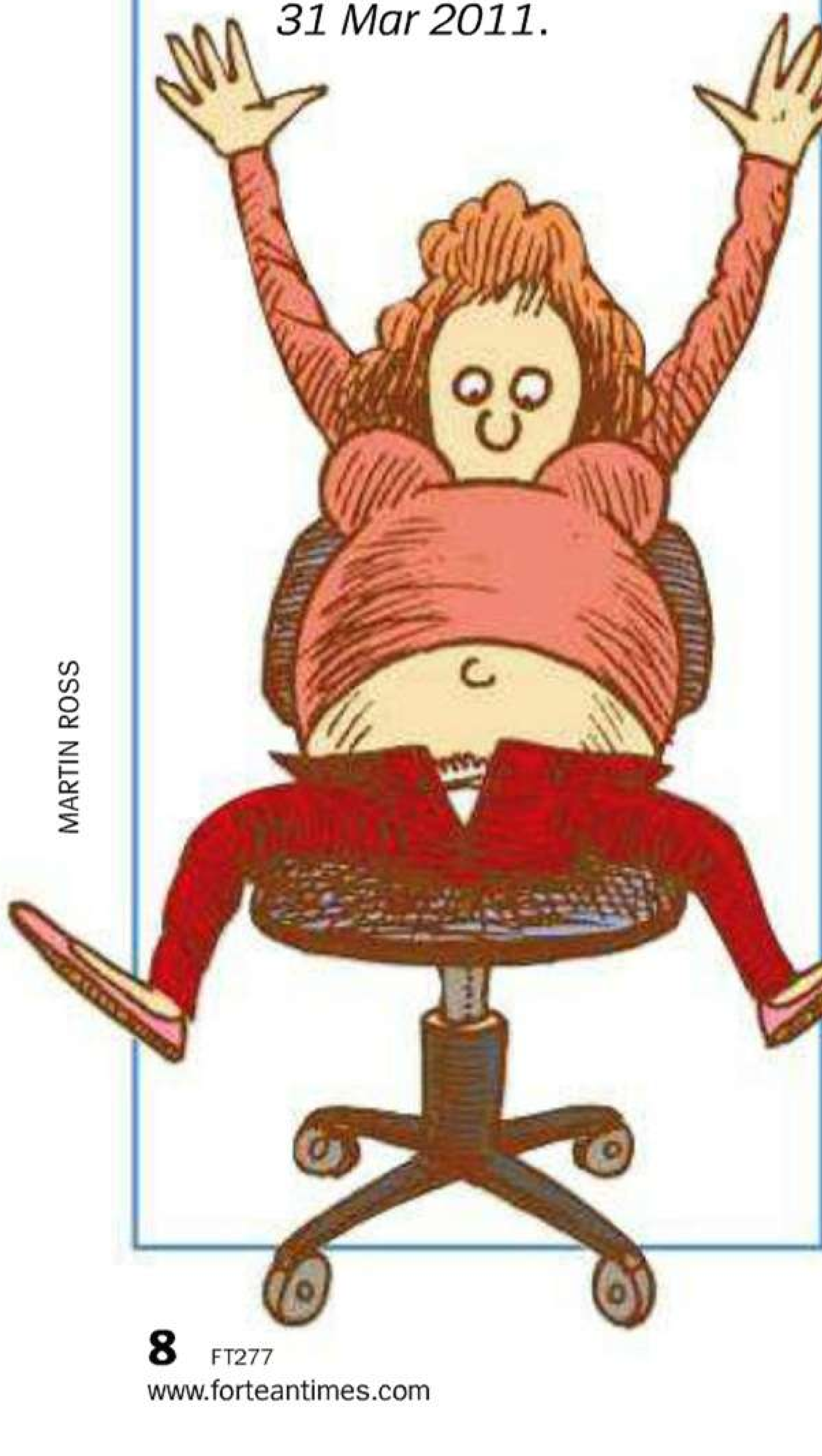
Thieves have returned an ancient rock after locals warned it was cursed. The Gibbet Stone, which is said to have marked the spot where 18th-century criminals were hanged, was stolen from Dethick, Derbyshire, in February. *Metro, 1 April 2011*.

FASTER, PUSSY CAT!

Air traffic controllers in Yakutsk, Siberia, claim they were buzzed by a UFO flying at 6,000mph (9,600km/h) with a female-sounding alien "saying 'miaow-miaow' all the time". Footage of the incident (date unknown) was posted on YouTube in February. Radar showed the UFO moving rapidly while pursuing planes travelled much slower. *dailymail.co.uk, 1 Mar 2011*.

FERTILITY SEAT

Receptionists at the Best Western Moore Place Hotel in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, are refusing to use a blue swivel chair at their desk after seven colleagues fell pregnant within 18 months after sitting on it. The four who have so far given birth – Elaine Ledster, Kim Gidley, Laura Burchill and Gina Ripley – have all had boys. Alyce Grisley, Claire Fitchett and Seran Daines were still expecting. *Sun, D.Mail, 31 Mar 2011*.



MARTIN ROSS

Life not as we know it

Video hit on web, plus new evidence for an earthlike world

'ET IS DEAD' FILM

A video claiming to show an alien corpse became a huge hit online on 17 April. In the next two days, it was viewed by 1.2 million people on YouTube. The minute-and-a-half clip, supposedly made by two walkers in Irkutsk, Russia, shows what appears to be the badly damaged body of a 2ft (60cm) creature lying in the snow. Part of its right leg is missing and there are deep holes for its eyes. The area was said to be a UFO hotspot with dozens of sightings reported every year. Indeed, locals allegedly reported seeing an alien spaceship crash in the area the previous month. UFO enthusiasts said the corpse could have been left behind by alien visitors or missed by Russian military covering up a spaceship crash. "We couldn't believe it when we saw it," said someone calling himself "Igor Molovic", one of the pair who uploaded the video. "What was spooky was there was no sign of the spaceship. Perhaps that was taken and the bodies overlooked." Alex Komanov from the Russian UFO Research Centre said: "The body is interesting. The texture is similar to a real biological entity. However, the creature has no clothes and I am sure that intelligent beings would be dressed in something like a spacesuit or coveralls."

The story rapidly unravelled. The alien had been made from stale bread and filmed by Timur Hilall, 18, and his friend Kiril Vlasov, 19. Their find was deemed serious enough for the Kremlin to get involved and a spokesman from the Russian interior ministry said it was a hoax. "We found the alien in one of the students' homes," he said. "It was lying under his bed and an examination revealed it was made of bread crumbs covered in chicken skin." Naturally, conspiracy theorists accused the government of a cover-up. "We know what we saw," said one. "Powerful people in the military just don't want us to see this." *Metro, 20 April; dailymail.co.uk, 19+20+21 April 2011*.

> "Powerful people just don't want us to see this"

A PLANET FIT FOR LIFE

A planet 20 light years away is the first outside our Solar System to be declared habitable. The "exoplanet" Gliese 581d was discovered in 2007, along with Gliese 581c, occupying the outer and inner edges respectively of the "Goldilocks zone" in which liquid water can be sustained. Gliese 581c was soon determined to be too close to its host star Gliese 581, a red dwarf, to sustain water, having a surface temperature exceeding 1,000°C (2120°F). Conversely, the outlying planet 581d, with a mass about six times that of Earth and twice its size, was initially thought to be too cold to have liquid water.

Now, French researchers have run computer simulations of the planet's atmosphere, arguing that it is likely to contain high levels of carbon dioxide. They contend that conditions could be suitable for oceans of liquid water, clouds and rainfall. However, 581d would not be pleasant for humans. The sky would be murky red, gravity twice what it is on Earth, doubling the weight of anyone on the surface, and the carbon dioxide-rich atmosphere would not be breathable.

Robin Wordsworth, a member of the team from the Institut Pierre Simon Laplace in Paris, said the findings were further evidence that the sheer variety of planets and environments far exceeded that which we see in our own Solar System. "The Gliese system is particularly exciting for us as it's very close to Earth, relatively speaking," said Dr Wordsworth. "So with future generations of telescopes, we'll be able to search for life on Gliese 581d directly."

More than 500 planets have been recorded since 1995, detected mostly by a tiny wobble in stellar light, although many astronomers believe billions of others exist. In December, Prof. Stephen Hawking said it was perfectly rational to assume there were other life-forms in the Universe. Researchers from the University of London recently suggested that aliens could be living on as many as 40,000 other planets. NASA scientists studying the results from the Kepler telescope extrapolate that as many as 50 per cent *of all stars in the Universe* are orbited by Earth-like planets. To say all this is mere speculation would be an extravagant understatement. Dr Howard Smith, a senior astrophysicist at Harvard, believes there is very little hope of discovering aliens and, even if we did, it would be almost impossible to make contact. One crucial factor is the vast distances involved. Forteans, of course, are content to suspend judgement. *Sunday Times, 23 Jan; D.Mail, 24 Jan; D.Telegraph, 21 Feb; BBC News, MX News (Sydney), 17 May 2011*.

The bone robbers...

“Pious theft” of sacred souvenirs continues to this day

GOING, GOING, GONHORRHŒA

A skull purporting to belong to St Vitalis of Assisi, the patron saint of genital diseases, was bought at an auction in Co. Meath, Ireland, on 29 May 2011 by a bidder from Los Angeles. The dubious relic, housed in a Queen Anne carved wooden reliquary with a garland of dead flowers, went for 3,500 euros at the auction in Annesbrook House in Duleek. “The Anglo-Irish family [from Co. Louth] who are selling it had an ancestor who brought it back from a grand tour in the 18th century,” said the auctioneer, Damien Matthews. “The current owners didn’t want it frightening their kids in the hall and so it was pushed out to an outbuilding, which is where I came upon it.”

There are no official documents verifying the identity of the cracked skull. The relic is claimed to be that of a martyr; St Vitalis of Assisi (1295–1370) was no martyr, but a licentious youth from Umbria in Italy who attempted to expiate his sins by going on pilgrimage to various European sanctuaries. Returning home, he became a Benedictine monk and spent the rest of his life in utter poverty in a hermitage near Assisi. After his death, word spread of his holy reputation and ability to perform miracles on those with bladder and genital problems. When his bones were moved to a new resting place in Viole Cathedral in 2001, there was no mention of a missing skull. However, another Vitalis died as a martyr in Bologna in the fourth century. Whoever the skull belonged to, the Catholic Church naturally disapproved of its sale, as Statute 1190 of the Code of Canon Law states: “It is absolutely forbidden to sell sacred relics.” *Belfast Telegraph, 23 May; Meath Chronicle, 25 May; Independent, 31 May 2011.*

MATTHEWS AUCTION ROOMS

THE RESURRECTIONIST

A Catholic priest was charged with ‘body-snatching’ after the remains of a child ‘saint’ were dug up in the Midlands. Father Wojciech Jasinski, 40, was accused of exhuming the bones of Witold Orlowski around October 2009. Polish Catholics have campaigned for Witold’s canonisation since he died in a Mexican village in 1944. The 14-year-old boy had prayed to God to take his life rather than that of Jozef Jarzebowski, the village priest who was said to be terminally ill. The priest recovered and Withold died. It is unclear what killed him, although one theory is that he may have contracted tetanus. His family had fled Poland at the start of World War II and his father and sister died of typhus as they travelled through Ukraine and western Siberia.

Jasinski was arrested after police received a complaint that Witold’s remains were missing from his grave at St Raphael’s Convent in Lower Bullingham, Herefordshire. They were recovered at Fawley Court in Oxfordshire, where Witold’s mother is buried. Zofia Orlowski, who brought her son’s remains to Britain in 1953, worked at Fawley Court in the 1960s when it was a Polish boys’ school, and was buried in its grounds in 1995. The 17th-century mansion had been owned by Jasinski’s religious order, the Marian Fathers, for many years, but is now the home of philanthropist Aida Hersham and her partner, Marks and Spencer heir Patrick Sieff. Withold has been officially reburied in his mother’s grave, and Jasinski appeared at Worcester Crown Court on 3 May. The judge bailed him to return to court in July to allow him to carry out missionary work in the Ukraine. *Sunday Mercury, 13 Feb; D.Mail, 14 Feb; Metro, 4 May 2011.*

WELL-TRAVELLED RELIC

A 56-year-old Cypriot monk, aged 56 (or 42), was detained at Athens airport on 16 January after security staff discovered a skull wrapped in cloth and skeletal remains in a sheet inside his baggage. He said the remains belonged to a female saint, a nun called Elena Vathiadou, and he was transferring them to a monastery in Cyprus. Vathiadou, who died in 2007, was not an official saint in the Greek or Cypriot Orthodox Churches, but may have been venerated by a sect within the church.

In many Greek Orthodox churches, venerated relics are put on display for the faithful to touch or kiss and a box for collecting donations from the faithful placed nearby. “It appears to be the work of charlatans with a financial interest – that is what I suspect,” said Cyprus’s Archbishop Chrysostomos when asked about the monk’s tale. The monk was freed after being charged with theft and desecrating the dead, a misdemeanour in Greece. He was also suspended from his monastic duties for three months for going away without leave. *[R] 18 Jan; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 21 Jan 2011.*

SIDELINES...

LUNAR MUTILATIONS

Horse owners and breeders in New South Wales fear someone who mutilated stallions’ genitalia 10 years ago is behind a spate of renewed attacks carried out on a full moon. On 15 April, more than 50 owners voted to form a vigilante group to monitor horses every full moon. At least 10 horses in the Thurgoona area had suffered bloody injuries to their penises, thought to have been caused by nylon rope nooses. Three had to be put down. *(Sydney) Sun Herald, 17 April 2011*.

BY NAME AND NATURE

A 53-year-old man from Chicopee in Massachusetts was charged with drunken driving for the fifth time on 2 January after an accident in nearby Holyoke. William J Drinkwine was his name. *mass.live.com (MA), 3 Jan 2011*.

SWAN MASSACRE

A sniper appeared to be picking off swans in the West Country after 31 dead birds were reported in February. They were found in a few square miles around Blackford, Wedmore and Godney on the Somerset Levels. The killings represented about a quarter of the swan population in the area. Of the carcases that were recovered, most were killed by shots to the head from an air rifle. *D.Telegraph, 2 Mar; D.Mail, 3 Mar 2011*.

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

KNOTTY CRUMBLE

Andy Hamilton, 36, a gardener from Bristol, has found a solution to the problem of Japanese knotweed – eating it. Introduced to the UK as an ornamental plant in 1824, knotweed costs £150 million a year to keep under control. It tastes like rhubarb and is vitamin-rich. Mr Hamilton plans to publish his knotweed recipes, such as knotty crumble, ale and tea. *D.Mirror, 9 April 2011*.

FAKE HUSBAND

Six months after her marriage, an Indian woman discovered that her husband was a woman. Minati Khatua, 27, from Rourkela, was told by her husband, who gave the name Sitakant Routray, that they couldn't consummate their marriage because "he" was observing a religious ritual. Then she walked in on "him" in the bath. Police believe the groom, who had since vanished, posed as a man to obtain Miss Khatua's dowry, which included a car and £350. *D.Telegraph, 23 Dec 2010*.

DISEASE ERADICATED

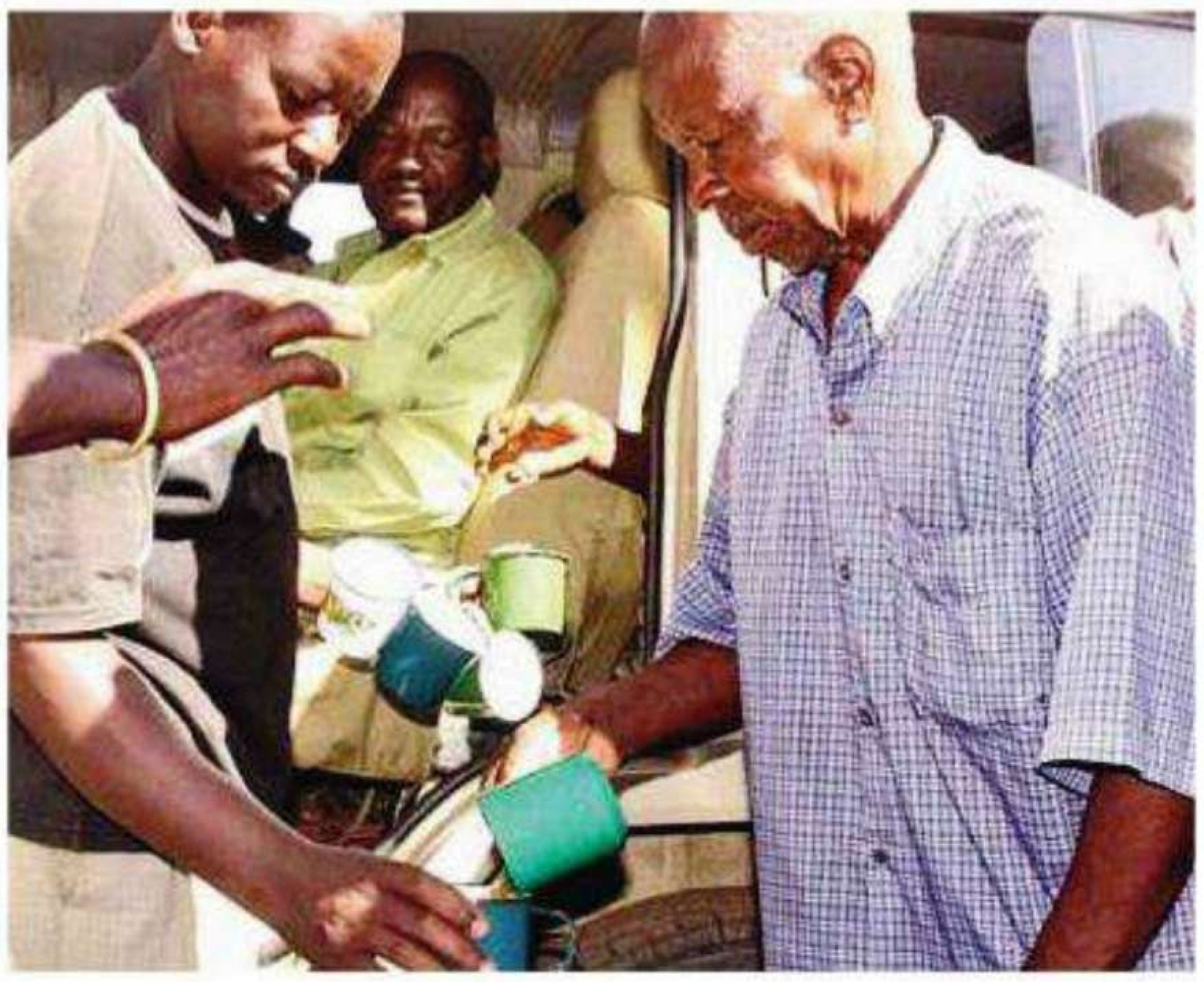
For only the second time, humans have eradicated a disease: rinderpest (German for cattle plague). The first victory was over smallpox, making this the first-ever animal disease to go. An effective vaccine was developed in the 1960s, and the last major outbreak was in Kenya in 2001. The eradication was announced formally in Paris in May 2011. *New Scientist, 20 Oct 2010; news-medical.net 26 May 2011*.

HOT OR NOT

Richard Elwood Sanden, 55, of Geneva, Ohio, accused of copulating with a corpse, told investigators he didn't at first realise the woman was dead. He was having sex with the 48-year-old woman, whom he had known for a few months, when he realised she wasn't breathing. He administered CPR and called an ambulance. Cause of death had yet to be determined. *[AP] 12 Jan 2011*.

OUT OF AFRICA

A SHAPE-SHIFTING MONSTER, PLUS A LUTHERAN PASTOR WITH A MAGICAL PANACEA



ABOVE LEFT: Ambilikile Mwasapile dispenses his homebrewed cure-all. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The crowds hoping to buy the potion.

IT'S BAWOKOZI!

The sleepy Karoo town of Steytlerville in South Africa's Eastern Cape has been buzzing with rumours of a shape-shifting monster. It was first spotted by mourners attending two separate funerals in March. According to Warrant Officer Zandisile Nelani, one man had reported it changed from a man in a suit into a pig and then into a bat. The creature had been sighted on a number of occasions near a church, but only at night. It had even been seen peering through the windows during a service, but had vanished by the time the congregation went outside. Although some people were frightened, it had not harmed any people or livestock.

Nelani said there were a further two sightings in the evening of Easter Sunday, 24 April. "Two men were walking near a tavern when they saw another man wearing a black jacket," he said. One of the men, identified only as Nozipho, went up to the stranger and asked him, 'What is your problem?'" When the stranger didn't respond, Nozipho went closer and saw that the man had no head. The man then turned into a dog that was "very angry" and "as big as a cow", Nelani said, adding that since the incident people were afraid to go near the tavern at night.

There were rumours that the monster could fly. Nelani said the community had dubbed the monster "Bawokozi", meaning brother-in-law. Police asked residents to try and take a photograph as evidence, and Nelani said one had been taken of the monster resting under a tree. When the photo was taken, the monster was in human form, but when it was developed it showed an "unknown animal". *news24.com (South Africa), 22+26 April 2011*.

QUEUING FOR A CURE

Ambilikile Mwasapile, 76, a former Lutheran preacher living in Samunge, a village in rural Tanzania near the border with Kenya, has been dispensing a herbal concoction said to cure just about any illness. During March, tens of thousands of sick people waited in line for a sip of his homebrewed drink. Samunge is remote, with no good roads, and is hard to teach from any sizeable town. It can take people from either side of the border days to reach him, with the elderly and sick camping out under trees on the way. On 28 March, Isidore Shirima, an official in Arusha, a town about six hours' drive from the pastor's village, said several dozen elderly and sick people had died in the queues. "We're not going to stop this," he said, "but we're going to organise it better."

Traditional healers are fairly mainstream in Tanzania, although their teachings can veer into the macabre. For example, there is widespread belief that the body parts of albinos have magical properties, and dozens of albinos have been killed by thugs, who sell their bones, hair and skin for thousands of dollars [**FT240:8, 260:22–23**]. At least 63 albinos, including children, are known to have been killed, mostly in the remote north-west of the country.

Mwasapile began administering his potion several months earlier and charged about 30 cents a cup. He said it could cure AIDS, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure – you name it. According to the *Daily Nation*, Kenya's largest newspaper, Tanzanian officials had tested the herbs in the potion and passed it as safe to drink. Mwasapile even had a Facebook page, listed under "Doctor, Arusha, Tanzania". At the end of March, he issued a statement saying he planned to halt new arrivals for a week until he could serve everyone who was already camped out there.

Esther Lally, a college graduate living in Arusha, said she saw helicopters landing in the bush ferrying Tanzanian politicians to Samunge. She said that the potion worked. "It's all about faith," she said. She had drunk it herself for her ulcers two weeks earlier, and was already feeling better. It tasted "like tea, without the sugar". *Int. Herald Tribune, 30 Mar; Metro, 6 May 2011*.

Honeymoon from Hell

Newlyweds managed to select four months of disasters

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / CHRISTOF STACHE

LIVE
BREAKING NEWS
NHK WORLD
M8.4 QUAKE HITS JAPAN
NEWSLINE

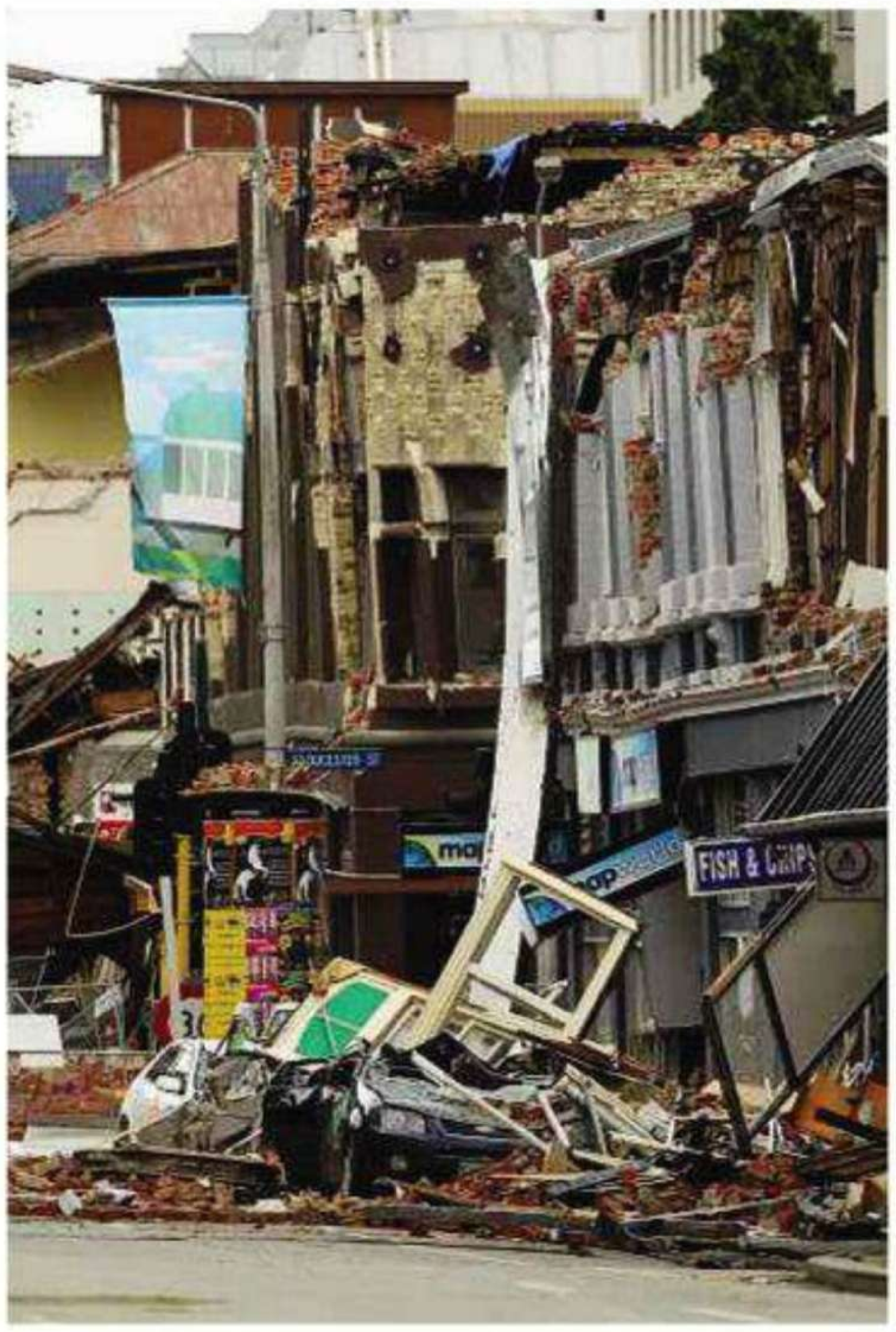
GETTY IMAGES / AFP

Stefan and Erika Svanstrom from Stockholm were married last November, and the following month set out on a four-month honeymoon with their baby daughter, Elinor. "Our holiday turned out to be a bit more than we bargained for," said Mrs Svanstrom, 32, in a classic of Swedish understatement.

It began with a flight to Munich on 6 December, where the Svanstroms ran into a violent blizzard dubbed by the German media as "the storm of the century" (above). They were stranded in the airport while they waited for the weather to subside. Almost as soon as they landed on the island of Bali, their hoped-for sunshine was blotted out by torrential monsoon rains. In January, they headed for Perth, which was struck by fierce bush fires hours after they touched down. They escaped to Cairns in Queensland, where they were hit by cyclone Yasi, one of the worst ever experienced in the state. "We escaped by the skin of our teeth," said Mrs Svanstrom. "Trees were being knocked over and big branches were scattered all over the streets." They were evacuated to a shopping centre where they had to spend 24 hours seeking shelter on a concrete floor along with 2,500 other people who had fled the cyclone. In Brisbane, the family saw some of the worst flooding the city had ever experienced.

> **"We couldn't visit the city as it was declared off-limits"**

Then it was on to Christchurch in New Zealand, where they arrived hours after the city was hit by February's 6.3-magnitude earthquake (below). "The whole town was like a war zone," said Mrs Svanstrom. "We couldn't visit the city as it was declared off-limits." Two days after they arrived in Japan, they lived through the devastating 9.0-magnitude earthquake (above) on 11 March (the largest since records began) and subsequent tsunami that struck the Fukushima nuclear power plant, raising fears of a meltdown. "The trembling was horrible and we saw roof tiles fly off the buildings," said Mr Svanstrom, 38 (who also experienced the Southeast Asia tsunami of 2004).



GETTY IMAGES / CAMERON SPENCER

The family arrived back in Stockholm on 29 March after finally enjoying some peace at their last destination in China. "I could only laugh," said Mrs Svanstrom. "Marriages have to endure some trials, but I think we have been through most of them." *MX News (Sydney), 6 April; Independent, 8 April 2011.*

- Following much the same itinerary as the Svanstroms was Paul Lancaster, 30, a financial adviser from Stockport, who took a holiday after being laid off. He was in Australia for the floods, New Zealand for the earthquake and Osaka, Japan, for the tsunami. "I'm not sure we want him to come back," said his parents Lynne and Paul. "Who knows what might happen?" *D.Telegraph, 26 Mar 2011.*

SIDELINES...

SNAPPY VISITOR

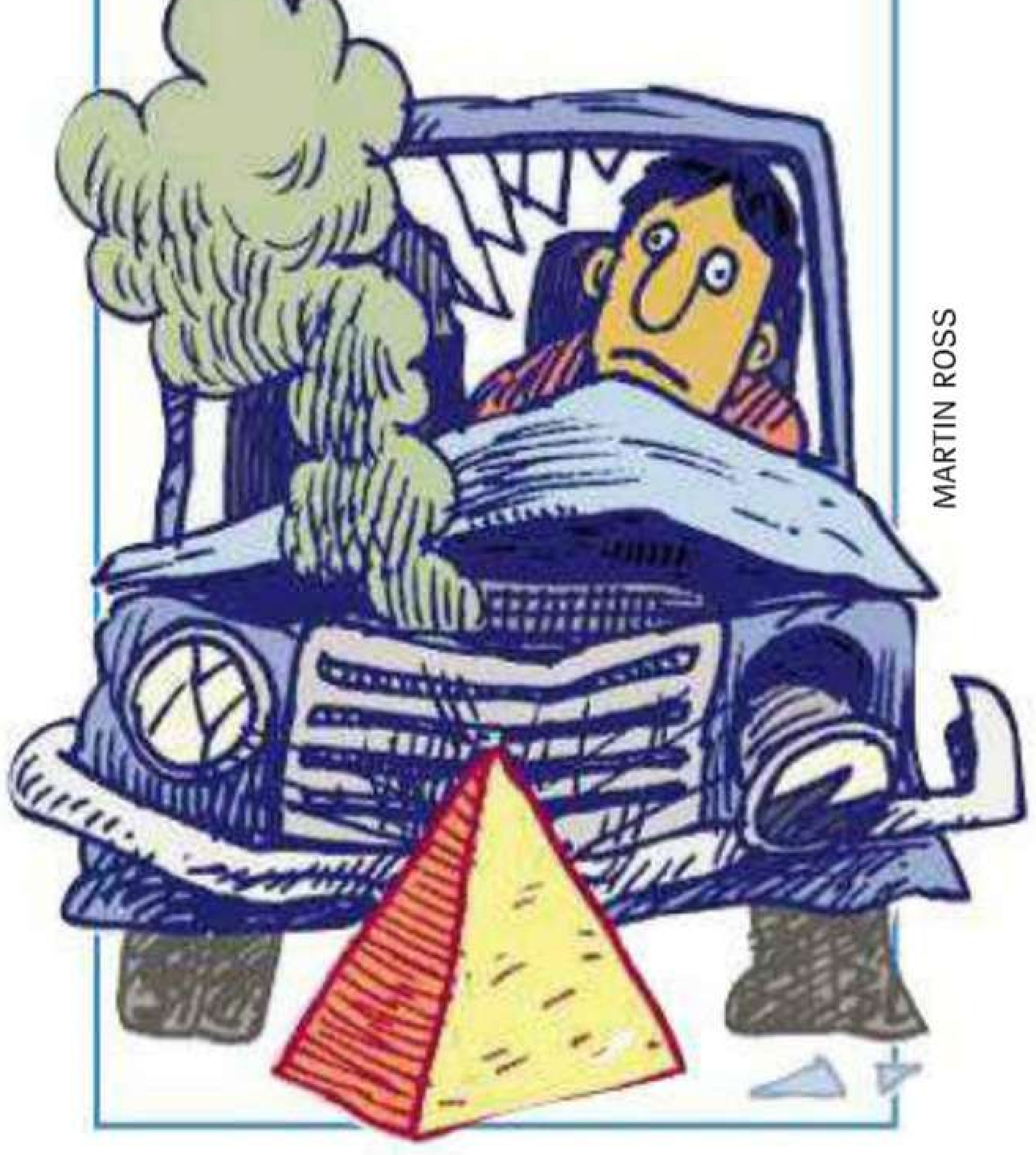
After floodwaters receded from her home in the city of Parauapebas in north-central Brazil on 25 February, a woman was shocked to find a 5ft (1.5m) alligator lying behind a sofa as her three-year-old son patted its head. She snatched the boy away and called firefighters. Luiz Claudio Farias, captain of firefighters, said it was lucky the reptile wasn't hungry, as it could have seriously hurt – or even eaten – the boy. It was taken to a nearby environmental reserve and set free. *[AP] 24 Feb 2011.*

IQ AT ROOM TEMPERATURE

When Nathan Pugh, 49, tried to rob a bank in Texas, the teller demanded identification, which Pugh handed over in return for $800. He produced his client card for the very bank he was robbing. The idiot was sent down for eight years. *MX News (Sydney), 21 Mar 2011.*

PYRAMID PROJECT

Traffic officers in Nagpur, 540 miles (870km) west of Mumbai in India, have allowed small pyramids to be placed at 10 accident black spots in the city to see if their "positive energy" can reduce the number of crashes. The move was inspired by Sushil Fatehpuria, an expert in *vastu* (similar to Chinese *feng shui*). Each copper-bottomed pyramid was a foot (30cm) tall and contained five smaller pyramids. *(Sydney) Herald Sun, 13 July 2010.*



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

YETI PROBE

There's a plan to open a Russian scientific institute to study yetis. Later this year, the town of Tashtagol in the coal-mining region of Kemerovo in western Siberia will host an international conference on yetis, where a final decision about the institute will be made. There are said to have been 15 yeti eyewitness reports in one remote area of the Shoria Mountains in the last year. Dr Igor Burtsev, who will head the institute, said: "They told us yetis were stealing their animals." *D.Express, D.Telegraph, 23 Mar 2011.*

GIANT HAILSTONE

A 31oz (879g) hailstone that fell in Vivian, South Dakota, on 23 July 2010 was declared the largest ever recorded in North America, even though ranch hand Leslie Scott who found it said it melted somewhat while waiting to be evaluated. It was 8in (20cm) wide with a circumference of 18¾in (48cm). However, much larger *meteoric* ice lumps have been recorded falling round the world. *[AP] 30 July 2010.*

OLDER, NOT WISER

A pensioner from Jena in Germany who wanted to seal off the entrance to his cellar ended up trapped when he walled himself in. He told police he only became aware of the mistake once his work was complete. After camping in the cellar for several days, he freed himself by knocking down his neighbours' wall rather than his own. He had been feuding with them for some time; and they informed police after hearing drilling. *[R] 26 Nov 2010.*

SPONTANEOUS HEIMLICH

American trucker Richard Paylor, 55, was saved from choking to death on an apple when he blacked out and his lorry crashed into a concrete barrier in Reading, Pennsylvania, on 29 March. The impact dislodged the apple chunk from his gullet. "I guess I have to thank the wall," he said. *[AP] 30 Mar 2011.*

THE OWL AND THE PUSSYCAT... AND THE DOLPHINS!

WWW.FUMANDGEBRA.COM

It is a modern twist on the Edward Lear poem of the owl and the pussycat who went to sea. A video of Fum the cat and Gebra the barn owl has become a huge hit on YouTube with almost 500,000 viewings.

The two are seen playing together, with the barn owl swooping low and Fum playfully trying to catch her. The two also chase each other on the ground and up in a tree.

It is believed they get on so well together because they have been friends since they were young; they also share an instinct to hunt rodents. Gebra is evidently the boss: when Fum gets a little too excited, she gives him a friendly little peck to calm him down.

It is unclear where the video is from but the poster is based in Spain. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iqmba7npY8g. *dailymail.co.uk, 16 May; Eve. Standard, 16 May 2011.*

- A video of Arthur the cat nuzzling dolphins Shiloh and Thunder has become an Internet sensation. The clip, from Theatre of the Sea in Islamorada, Florida, in 1997, shows the cat leaning over the side of a boat, playing with dolphins in the water. At one point, Arthur holds a dolphin's beak with his paw and the pair seem to kiss.

See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rynvewVe21Y; *D.Mail 10 April 2011.*

Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-two Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-two years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. In 2005 I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg. I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

> *"My writing career took off exponentially."*

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2008. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

Hazel McHaffie

Tim Skelton

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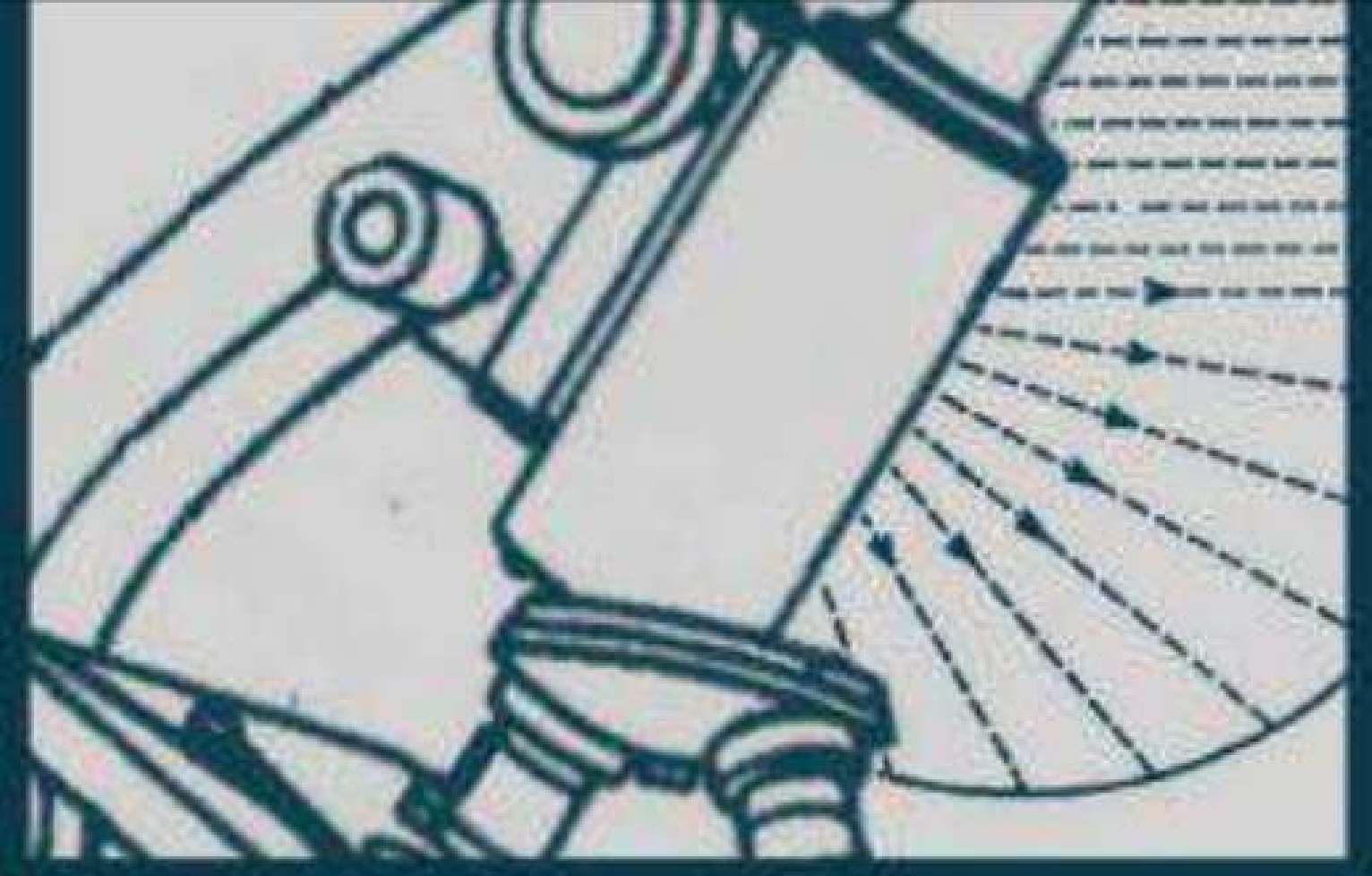

MATT PATTINSON

THE NEW COLD FUSION

The 'free energy' from Cold Fusion went rapidly from a news sensation to an embarassing science sideshow, but, as **DAVID HAMBLING** reveals, it refuses to go away completely.

Cold fusion has been bubbling away in the background for years. Damned by orthodox science and consigned to the far fringes, it has doggedly refused to go away. Now it's boiling over, as a dramatic new Italian development threatens to break into the mainstream and provide cheap energy on a commercial scale. Or is it just another free energy scam?

The original 1989 cold fusion experiment was simple enough. You pass an electric current through heavy water using electrodes made of palladium, and supposedly you get more energy out than you put in. The experimenters argued that the tiny amount of excess energy must be from a nuclear fusion reaction at the electrode, an observation that has never been fully explained.

When other researchers failed to replicate the effect, a slanging match ensued, cold fusion was discredited and reputations were destroyed. The title of Gary Taube's book – *Bad Science: The Short Life and Weird Times of Cold Fusion* – tells you everything.

Cold fusion researchers now keep a low profile, but some still claim to get positive results. Perhaps most intriguingly, there has been a long-term interest from the US military, in particular the Naval Research Laboratory.

The new research comes from a quite different direction. Italian inventor Andrea Rossi was working on making fuel using hydrogen and carbon monoxide with a nickel catalyst when he noticed that his apparatus seemed to be producing heat. He says he explored and refined this effect, and the end result is an "energy catalyser". As with the deuterium-palladium effect, a nuclear reaction is said to take place, but with much cheaper nickel and hydrogen components. More importantly, the output is vastly greater – high enough for serious power generation.

Rossi collaborated with Sergio Focardi of the University of Bologna, and in January they gave a press conference,[1] showing off a device that provides a 12-kilowatt output (in this case, boiling water) for a 400-watt electric input. They claim that traces of copper have been found in the nickel catalyst afterwards, indicating transmutation as would be expected had a nuclear reaction taken place.

SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY / PHILIPPE PLAILLY

ABOVE: Fleischmann-Pons-type electrolysis cells photographed at Minoru Institute of Advanced Research, southern France, in 1993.

The lack of technical detail at the press conference, coupled with the scale of their claims, naturally brought a sceptical response, and there has been very little mainstream reporting of the Rossi-Focardi research. It looks too much like a classic 'free energy' scam: inventors refuse to explain how their device works and will not let others examine their apparatus, but ask for a few million to continue their work. As far back as 1775, the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris refused to accept any more proposals for perpetual motion machines.

What makes the new device interesting is what has happened since the January demonstration. Two Swedish scientists, who had been doubtful of the demonstration – one is a member of the Swedish Sceptics Society – were given a miniature version of the device. They were not allowed to take it apart, but they could measure the energy output. It produced four kilowatts over an extended period – more than could be accounted for by trickery such as concealed batteries:

"Any chemical process should be ruled out for producing 25 kWh (kilowatt-hour) from whatever is in a 50 cubic centimetre container. The only alternative explanation is that there is some kind of a nuclear process that gives rise to the measured energy production."[2]

In March, Rossi said that he was giving two devices to the researchers' home universities in Uppsala and Stockholm for further study. Two further investigations yielded similar results.

Meanwhile, a new Greek company called Defkalion Green Technologies is building a generator using several hundred Focardi-Rossi Energy Catalysers to produce a one-megawatt output.[3] This should be operational in October and appropriately enough will power a factory in Xanthi making energy catalysers. According to a report in the Greek media, the factory will employ over 200 people to produce 300,000 units a year. The Greek connection is because of Professor Christos Stremmenos, former Greek ambassador in Italy and long-time enthusiast for cold fusion.

In April, Rossi announced he had signed a licensing deal with a US company, Ampernergo, to produce the E-Cats. He claims that 97 units are now in use, many being tested by scientists; presumably they are keeping quiet because of the stigma attached to cold fusion. Rossi has been awarded an Italian patent for his device and has applied for one in the US.

However, some difficult questions remain, many relating to the radioactivity expected in a nuclear reaction, which seems to be curiously absent. No peer-reviewed paper has appeared on any of the energy catalyser tests; sceptics doubt that the control conditions have been strict enough to rule out fraud. Others ask about one of Rossi's previous inventions, a revolutionary thermoelectric power-generating device that started with great claims but came to nothing.

The Defkalion web site is uninformative for such an exciting new venture, though it does warn about a scam carried out in their name. Meanwhile Ampenergo seems to be looking for investors.

There are now various websites monitoring E-Cat developments.[4] One possibility is that home E-Cat generators will become common, providing all your domestic power for an estimated 5,000 euros. Otherwise, Rossi will join the legion of damned cold fusion developers. Watch this space…

NOTES

1 *Popular Science* magazine: http://bit.ly/gw8cVz.

2 NY Teknik (Swedish technology site): http://bit.ly/fhHUxC.

3 Quoted in *Free Energy Times*: http://bit.ly/kK5FUk.

4 www.e-catworld.com.

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Medical mysteries

Blind man sees, paralysed woman walks, & sex problems

MIRACLE RECOVERIES?

- George Hudspeth, 76, from Daventry in Northamptonshire, who went totally blind in 2010 after a decade of failing vision, has suddenly regained his eyesight. Three visits to his doctor have not explained his apparent recovery from dry age-related macular degeneration, which claimed the sight of his father and sister. The Macular Disease Society said he must have been misdiagnosed because, they insist, recovery is impossible.

The former soldier said his life changed in mid-February during an advertisement break on television when he picked up a picture of his wife Sheila, who died of pneumonia in 2009, aged 51. "I speak to her every night and tell her what I have been doing," he said. "Then when I looked back to the television I could see the picture in full colour. I was terrified. I actually thought I was losing the plot or losing my marbles."

He stayed up until 5am watching TV in case his sight went again. Later, he saw his five-month-old granddaughter Kelly-Mae Dicks for the first time. "It was an amazing moment," he said. "She has a right chubby little face." We have to wonder why he was listening to the television rather than the radio before his sight returned, as surely it would be difficult to follow without the pictures – or did he have company? *Metro, D.Express, 18 Feb 2011.*

NEWS INTERNATIONAL / ANITA MARIC

- On Christmas Day 1987, Delia Knox was on her way home after a church service in Toronto, Canada, with her sister and brother-in-law when a drunk driver ploughed into her car. Her relatives escaped with minor injuries, but she was left paralysed from the waist down and was confined to a wheelchair for the next 23 years.

In 2010, she agreed to attend a meeting with Nathan Morris, a British preacher at the Bay of the Holy Spirit Revival in Mobile, Alabama. "I wanted to get in the presence of God," she said. "I knew it was an evangelistic meeting but I didn't know healings were taking place. To be honest, I've stayed away from healing meetings. I've been pulled, plopped and dropped and rarely responded to altar calls. But Nathan Morris called my husband forward and I had no idea what was going on. I didn't want to make a scene when Nathan was praying for me. Then all of a sudden I felt a voice which I knew was the Holy Spirit saying to me 'Get up', and I felt feeling in my legs and then faith came on me to walk… I knew this was my night to walk out of the chair. I walked and walked and walked and felt I had entered another realm… I could feel my knees for the first time. They were bending and clicking into place."

Footage on YouTube shows the healer lifting her out of the wheelchair. People weep and clap as she stands up and independently moves her legs to make her way through the crowd, her steps steadied by two suited men. A later video shows her walking unaided. The 46-year-old gospel artist, who lives in the US, now rarely uses her wheelchair. Her husband, Bishop Levy Knox, said:

TOP: George Huspeth recovered his sight after going totally blind. **ABOVE:** Delia Knox was able to get up and walk after 23 years confined to a wheelchair.

"What has happened to my wife has changed our lives." *D.Mail, 22 Dec 2010.*

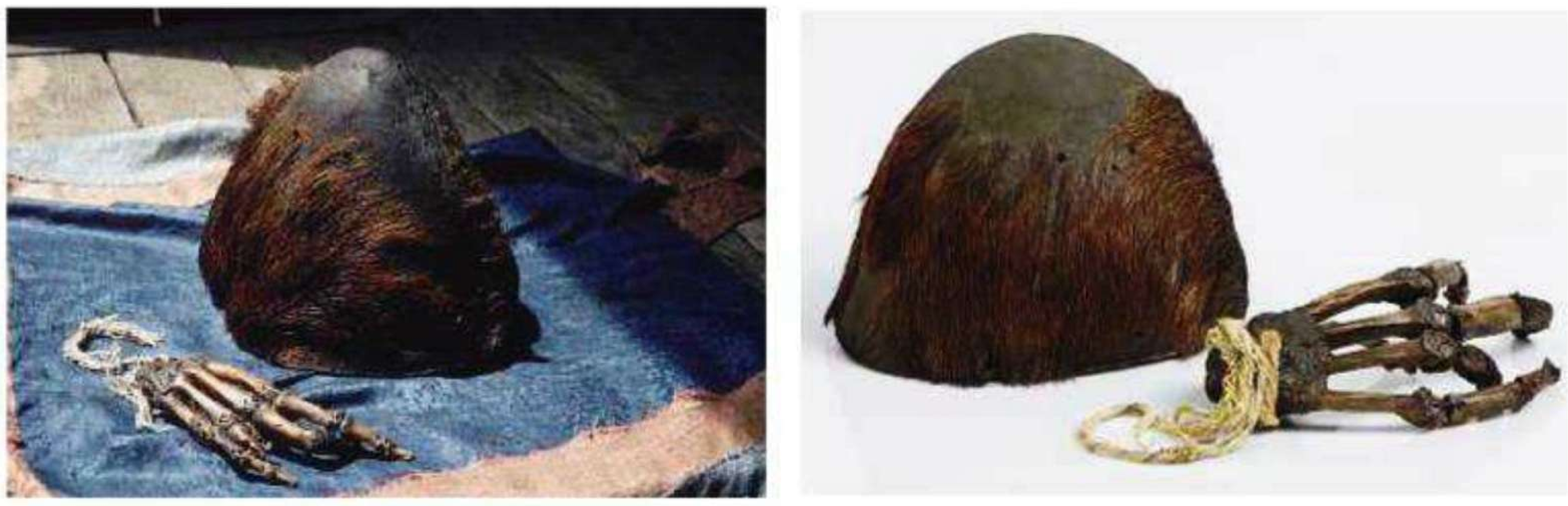
SEXUAL COMPLICATIONS

- A man was forced to seek medical help after going temporarily blind every time he had sex. The unnamed patient would lose his sight when he climaxed during intercourse. Bafflingly, the blindness would never occur while performing any other strenuous exercise. The report, published by the Department of Ophthalmology at Glostrup Hospital, University of Copenhagen, revealed the cause of the condition to be vasoconstriction, where the muscle walls contract around a blood vessel, restricting the flow of blood – in this case arterial blood supply to the eyes. Vasoconstriction is the same condition that causes erectile dysfunction. Doctors had earlier speculated that an embolism was causing the man's blindness, but the transient nature of the symptoms ruled this out. The patient was eventually treated using drugs to widen his blood vessels. *dailymail.co.uk, 29 Dec 2010.*

- Some men seem to be allergic to their own semen. The condition, known as post-orgasmic illness syndrome or POIS, was first documented in 2002. Symptoms, which can last for up to a week, include fever, runny nose, extreme fatigue and burning eyes. Some doctors had suggested the disorder was psychosomatic, but Marcel Waldinger, a professor of sexual psychopharmacology at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, and his colleagues demonstrated in two papers in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* that the syndrome was allergic in nature. They studied 45 men with POIS; 33 underwent a standard skin allergy test using a dilution of their own semen, and 29 of them – 88 per cent – showed a positive allergic reaction, indicating an autoimmune response. In the second study, Dr Waldinger used hyposensitisation therapy on two of the men, injecting them with steadily stronger solutions of their semen. The team found that after three years the men showed significantly fewer POIS symptoms. *LA Times, via Sydney Morning Herald, 20 Jan 2011.*

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden


GETTYY IMAGES / ERNST HAAS

WETA WORKSHOP / STEVE UNWIN

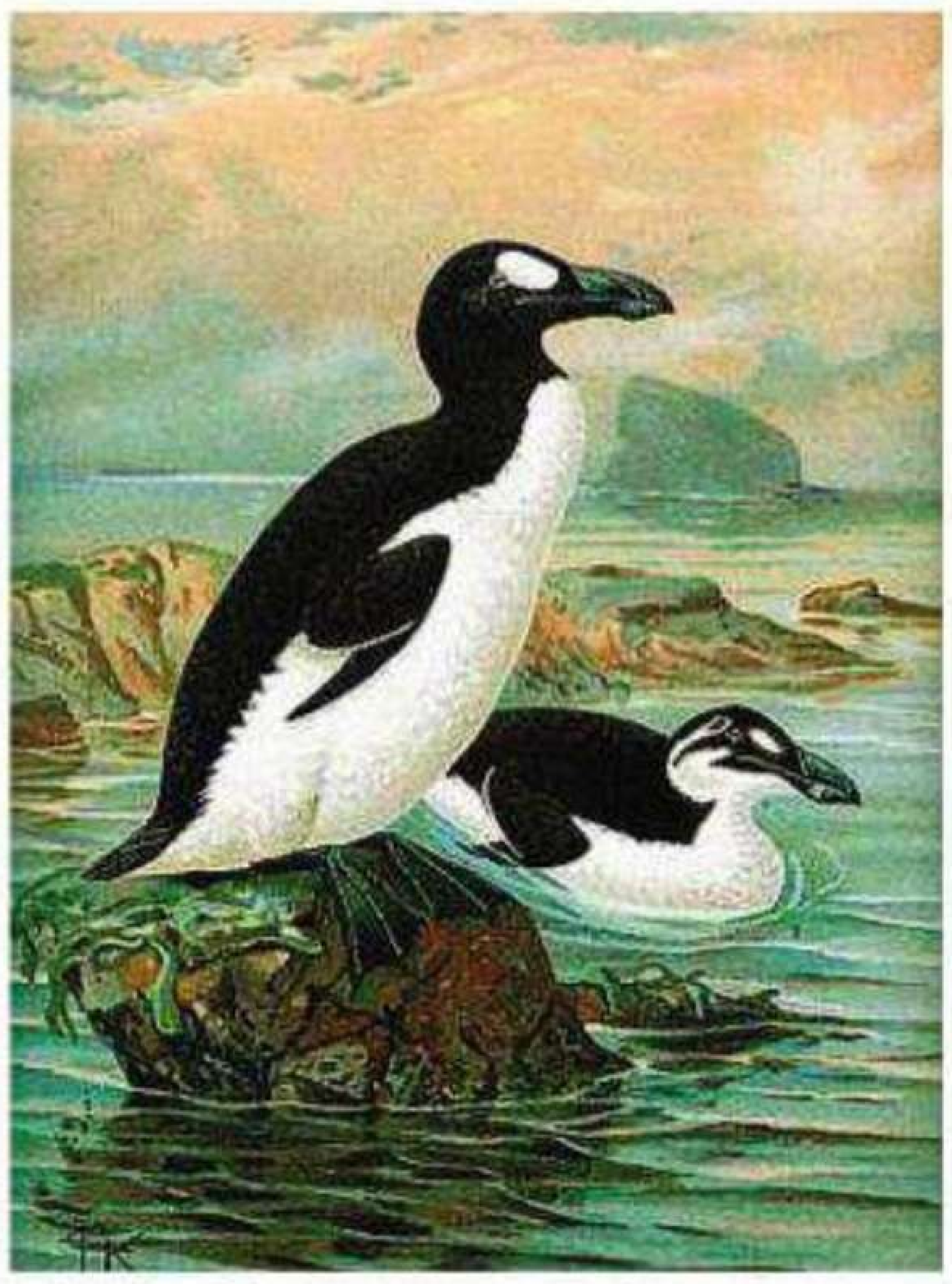
LEFT: The original (left) and replica "yeti skullcap" and "yeti hand". **BELOW:** Great auk – is it extinct or not?

HANDING BACK A YETI HAND

During the 1950s, a yeti-seeking expedition to Nepal led by Peter Byrne was shown the preserved hand of what may have been an unknown primate at Pangboche Monastery. Tragically, however, during the 1990s, shortly after it had appeared on an American television programme, the hand was stolen from the monastery by person(s) unknown, as was an alleged yeti scalp (though this was probably constructed from the skin of a serow, a native goat-antelope), and neither has been heard of since. Now, two decades later, the monastery will be receiving the next best things, when New Zealand pilot Mike Allsop donates replicas of the hand and the scalp. After learning about the thefts, Allsop had contacted Weta Workshop, a New Zealand firm of movie model makers, who agreed to create the replicas for free using photographs of the original specimens, and Allsop hopes that their presence at the monastery will help it to generate an income, by attracting tourists willing to pay a small fee to view them. *http://bbc.in/k2T4ga (BBC) 28 April 2011.*

A KIWI BY ANY OTHER NAME...?

Speaking of New Zealand, this is of course the only country on Earth where kiwis exist in the wild – which is why recent reports of a kiwi at large in Russia attracted considerable media attention there. The bird in question had been found skulking in a garden in the Black Sea port city of Sochi, where it had been hiding for the previous three days at least. But how could this famously flightless bird have got there? One popular theory was that it had been smuggled out of New Zealand and into Russia on a cruise ship before escaping. In reality, however, the correct explanation proved to be much less exotic – as, indeed, did the bird itself. When a photo of it was shown to Russian zoologist Alexander Kornilov, he recognised that it was not a kiwi at all, but a heron-related non-flightless species known as a bittern *Botaurus stellaris*. As bitterns commonly migrate through Sochi each spring, Kornilov speculated that perhaps this particular individual, a female, had met with some accident, damaging one of her wings and thereby preventing her from flying, so she had stayed there rather than continuing her migration. *telegraph.co.uk, 10 May; http://bit.ly/jbm0Jg (stuff.co.nz), 11 May 2011.*


JON GERRARD KEULEMANS

READER OF THE LOST AUK

I owe *FT* reader Dr Alan Gauld of Nottingham a long-overdue apology. Back in 2004, he kindly wrote to me via *FT* with news of a sighting of an alleged great auk *Pinguinus impennis* made long after 1844, this flightless sea bird's official year of extinction (**FT145:48**). Somehow, however, I managed to misplace his letter before I'd even had a chance to reply and never found it again – until this week, when I came upon it among a file of papers on a totally different subject. So here, only seven years late but still undocumented until now in the crypto-literature, is the sighting.

Published in the autumn 1929 issue of *Bird Notes and News*, it was reported by HAA Dombrain, a manager for an English concern in Norway's Lofoten Islands. Dombrain noted that one of his boatmen, a Finn called Jodas, an experienced hunter and amateur naturalist, had told him that earlier that day he and Dombrain's shipwright, a man called Evenson, had seen a bird under the wharf that, in spite of their experience, they were unable to identify. Intrigued, Dombrain showed them separately a series of bird illustrations, including all of the likely (and unlikely) species that it could be. To his great surprise, both of them independently selected an image of the great auk. Prior to its extinction almost a century earlier, the great auk had indeed inhabited the wild, sparsely-inhabited coasts of these northern Norwegian islands. Moreover, during the late 1930s, several sightings of alleged great auks were reported from the Lofotens, but when investigated these were found to feature a number of sub-antarctic king penguins *Aptenodytes patagonicus* that sailors had released there in August 1936. However, that release was several years *after* the sighting of Jodas and Evenson, so could they possibly have seen a lone, elusive great auk from some small colony that had somehow persisted beyond their species' official extinction date in this remote locality? *Dr Alan Gauld, pers. comm., 10 Nov 2004.*

MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE tells of appearances of primitive humans at seances, and of simian ghosts.

ALAMY / MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

LEFT: Franek Kluski materialising a bird spirit.
BELOW: Java Man appears at a Kluski seance.

MEN AND APES

Two stories with ghostly interest appearing in recent editions of *Fortean Times* deserve further comment.

The commemoration of Stan Gooch (1932–2010) in **FT272:38–47** mentioned the collective vision of a prehistoric man occurring at a Coventry séance held in the late 1950s, perhaps symbolic of his theories of Neanderthal inheritance that occupied his mind in later years. Describing this manifestation in his classic book *The Paranormal* (1978), Gooch stated: “This was a crouching ape-like shape, which became clearer as the moments passed. I guess it approximated to most people’s idea of what an ancient cave man would look like. Yet one could not make out too much detail – the eyes were hidden, for example. It stood in half shadow, watching us, breathing heavily as if nervous. I must say, though, that I sensed rather than heard the breathing. I could not decide whether our visitor was wearing the skin of some animal, or whether it had a rough coat of hair of its own.” Despite being questioned and invited to join the circle, the figure showed little response and faded away. Reflecting on his later work, Gooch wondered “if it was [a] classic Neanderthal I saw that evening.”

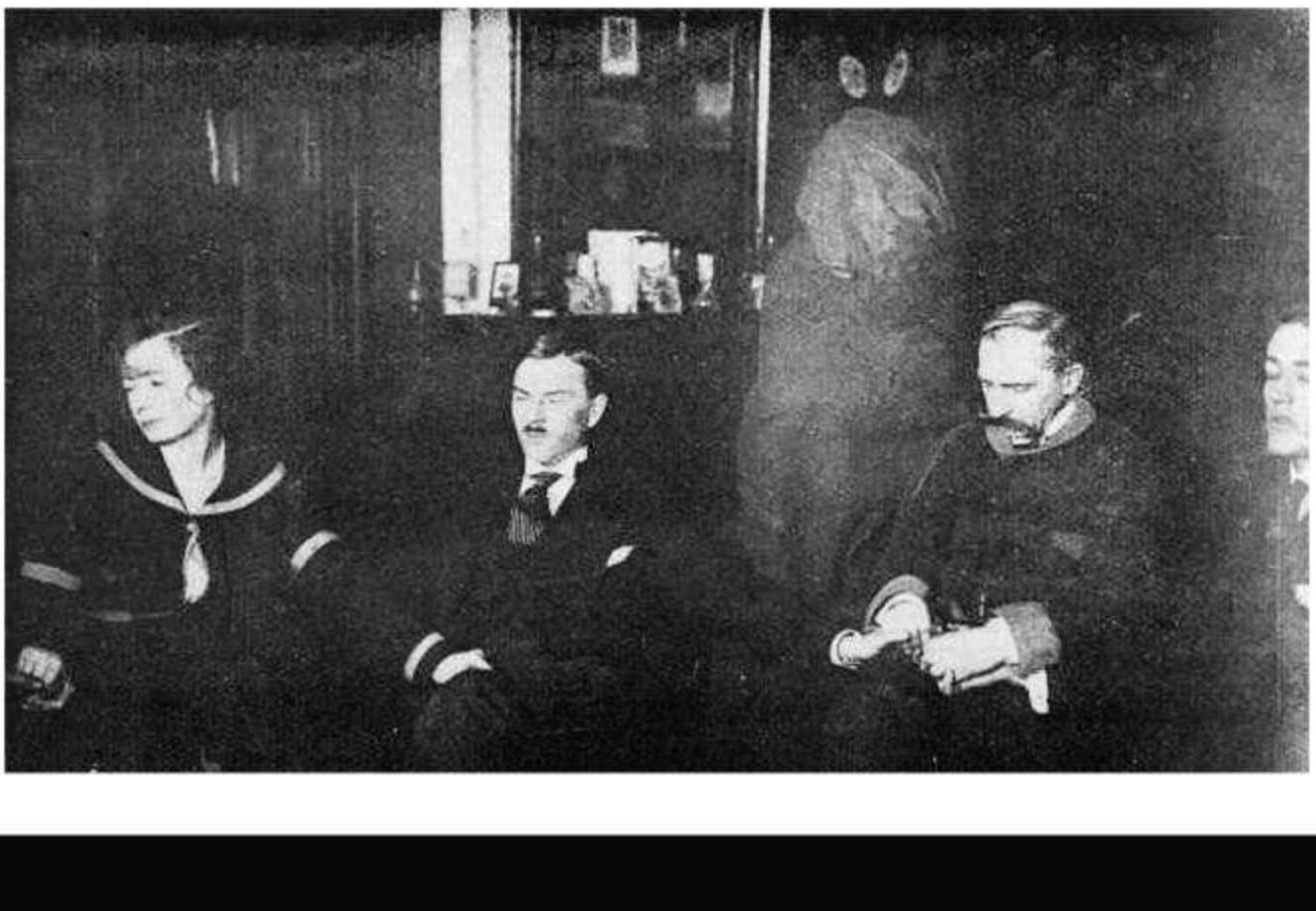
Remarkable as this story sounds, it is not unique in the annals of spiritualism. The form of a prehistoric man appeared in 1919 at a number in séances involving the Polish medium Franek Kluski (1873–1943). Relatively little has been published in English on the Kluski mediumship, most discussion concentrating upon mysterious casts of hands obtained from bowls of molten wax placed near him during séances; but far more remarkable were numerous materialised apparitions, with some captured on camera at sittings. Like many spiritualist photographs, these pictures are often less than convincing, though Kluski was never detected in fraud. Apparitions included not only the forms of dead persons, but also birds and animals and allegedly a prehistoric apeman, identified as a specimen of *Pithecanthropus* or ‘Java Man’. This was witnessed over successive months, including by a Dr Okolowicz who described how it developed.

It appeared as a mass of tangled hair, from which came the sound of loud chomping

First observed in July 1919, it appeared initially as a very nebulous mass of tangled hair, from the centre of which came the sound of loud chomping. Probably because of the great interest in this phenomenon on the part of the regular participants, particularly Okolowicz, this apparition continued to gain in clarity and strength over a number of consecutive séances, until, in early August, it became so clear that it could be observed and described in detail. It resembled a large anthropoid ape, covered in light brown fur (with a grey tinge in places), very abundant hair, curling on the head (the hair almost reaching the eyebrows) and under the chin. The entity had such enormous physical strength that it easily moved a heavy bookcase around the room and lifted a settee over the heads of the participants. Its behaviour, although at times frightening to those present, was never malicious, but testified only to the very low intelligence level of the apparition, which nevertheless demonstrated goodwill, gentleness and a willingness to obey. It was only the apparition’s over-eagerness that usually caused tragic-comical situations at the séances. It seemed to feel obliged to imitate the other apparitions in their activities, carried out on request from the participants. This could lead to chaotic situations, breaking the chain of hands and waking Kluski from trance.

When told off, it would hide for a time under the table or sit at the feet of the participants, lightly scratching their legs. It took a lot of effort to break it out of the habit of trying to lick the faces of the participants (and the medium) with an enormous salivating tongue, with participants protesting and requesting it should be dismissed! When staying longer, it would produce a very unpleasant smell, like a dirty cage of a wild animal.

In the autumn of 1919, the apparition became weaker, lacking its previous energy and strength, and at the next séance, on 28 November 1919, it seemed as if only fragments of it appeared in a number of places simultaneously. Thus, the familiar chomping was heard in one corner of the room, but very weak; in another corner could be heard the scratching on the floor, while at yet another location one of the participants felt some hairy mass rub against her leg. Subsequently, the apparition no longer showed itself, in spite of the efforts of participants during the following séances to bring it back by calling



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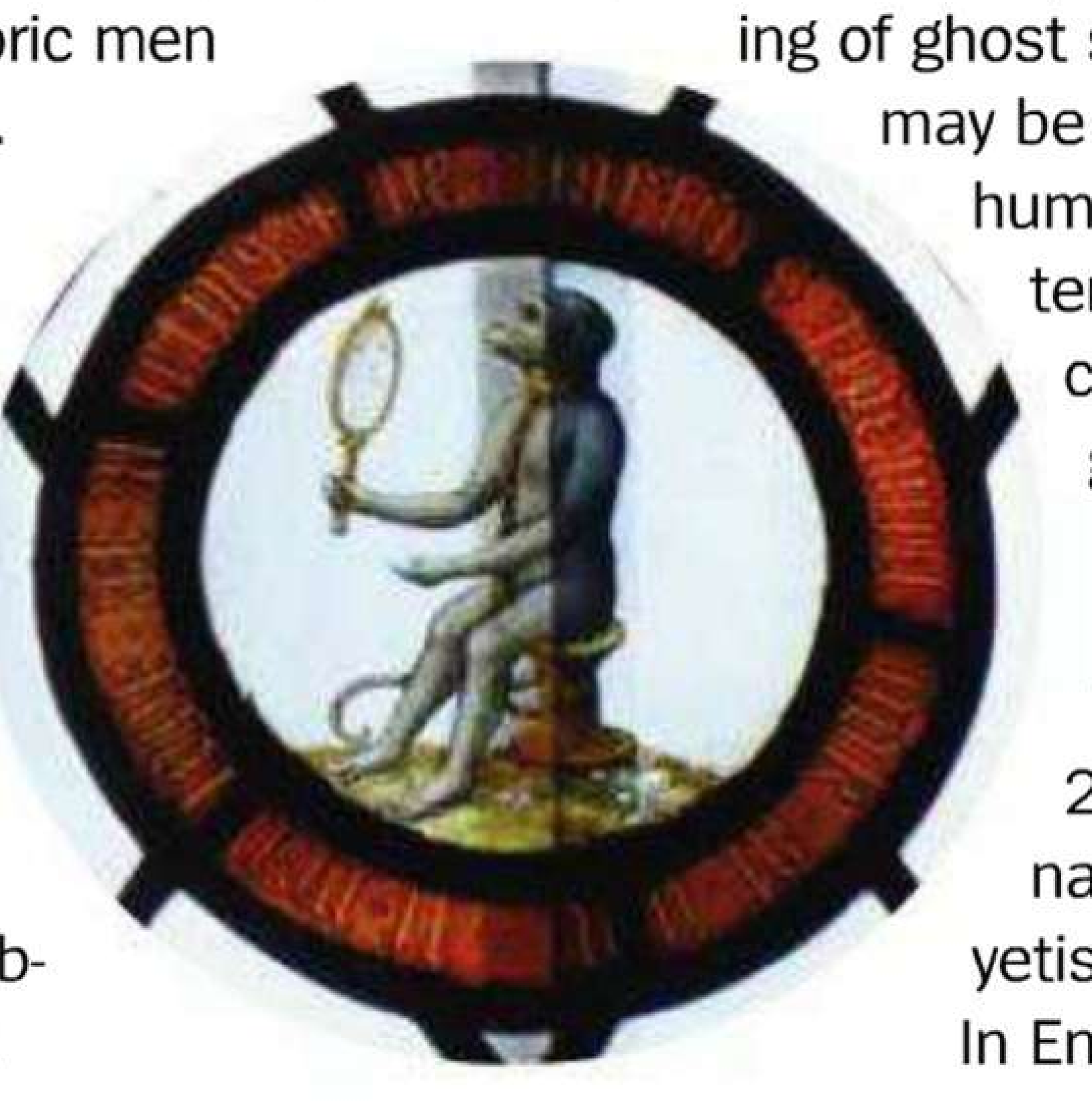
ABOVE LEFT: Athelhampton Hall, where a monkey ghost is said to scratch in the walls. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A surprised-looking ape in the Martyn family crest. **BELOW:** "Martyn's Ape" admiring itself in a hand-mirror. Legend has it starving to death in a locked room following its mistress's suicide.

ALL PIX : CAROLINA MANOSCA GRISALES

and thinking intensely about it. The form weakly manifested at séances in Paris in November and December of 1920, but these appearances were incomparably weaker and shorter than in Warsaw. It made its final appearance at a séance on 26 December 1922.

Dr Okolowicz later wrote a book on the mediumship of Kluski. He speculated that, like Gooch's Neanderthal, the figure had its origins in the subconscious mind of a sitter – namely himself – as he had a strong interest in fossil man. (Sources: Zofia Weaver: "The Enigma of Franek Kluski", *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* vol.58 1991–92, 289–98; Dr Zofia Weaver pers. comm. 7 April 2011).

Beyond these séance room examples, actual apparitions of prehistoric men are notable by their absence. Folklore avers many barrows and standing stones are haunted, but spectres are varied – including White Ladies and Black Dogs, but hardly ever the phantoms of their builders. Stories are common of ill-luck, storms and odd phenomena pursuing those disturbing ancient burial places, but few are vouched for by archæologists today. The shaggy ghosts of a prehistoric family were reputedly seen near Neolithic earthworks at Lustleigh Cleave on Dartmoor by a friend of folklorist Theo Brown (in *Transactions of the Devon Association* 1952, cited in "Shug Monkeys and Werewolves" by Jonathan Downes and Richard Freeman, in *Fortean Studies* vol.5, 1997). Feelings of terror experienced by a walker at Rhossily Bay, Wales, were attributed to energies stirred up by 'old Stone Men' in *Adventures With Phantoms* (1946) by R Thurston Hopkins – but the author is far from reliable. Undoubtedly, the best attested is the Bronze Age Horseman of Bottlebush Down, at Sixpenny Handley, Dorset, seen by Dr RC Clay, a local antiquarian, close by a round barrow. Mentioned in a number of ghost books dealing with Dorset, his sighting was confirmed to me by his grandson, Robert Snow.



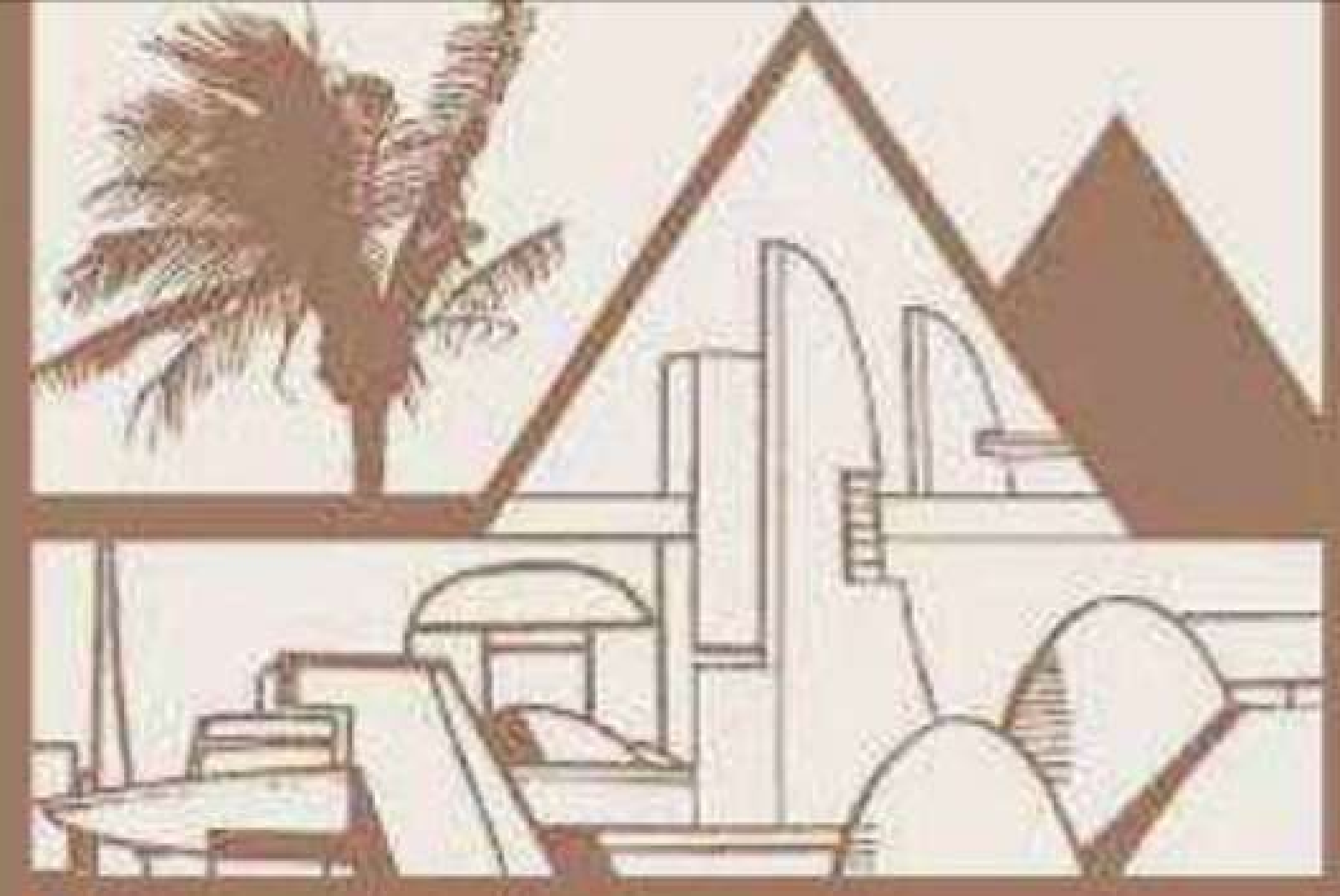
In 1988, I persuaded the *Guinness Book of Records* to include the Horseman as the record holder within its 'Most durable ghosts' category, replacing the phantom Roman soldiers of York and Mersea Island, Essex. The Bronze Age Horseman was duly included in later editions of the annual, until editors dropped this and other psychic categories (alas, it never included the world poltergeist weightlifting record – a Land Rover claimed in Brazil, a story noted by Guy Playfair in *The Flying Cow*, 1973, but probably verification was difficult).

Spreading across the wider evolutionary spectrum of primates, it may be noted that apes and monkeys also feature in a scattering of ghost stories, though there may be an overlap with many humanoid-ape entity encounters falling into the territory of cryptozoology, such as the ghostly Bigfoots of Nowata, Oklahoma (see Dennis Hauck: *Haunted Places: The National Directory*, 2002) and certain supernatural beliefs concerning yetis in the Himalayas.

In England, a ghostly monkey known as Martyn's Ape has long been said to haunt Athelhampton Hall, near Dorchester, Dorset, which I visited in April 2011. An ape features on the family crest of the Martyn family, which may well have sparked the legend, along with the Martyn family motto, "He who looks at Martyn's Ape, Martyn's Ape will look at him", taken from the mediæval euphemism for 'making an ape' of rivals or victims, as in Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale" (or in modern slang 'making a monkey' of someone). The original Sir William Martyn was a wine merchant and speculation is that his monkey was a pet or business mascot. In one tale, the monkey was the abandoned pet of a hapless Martyn girl who committed suicide, with the monkey starving to death in a locked room. James Wentworth Day, who did much to promote the ghosts of Athelhampton Hall in the 1960s, was disappointed that the ghostly monkey had not appeared for at least two generations. However, on visiting Athelhampton Hall in April 2011, I was told the monkey was supposedly heard rather than seen, with scratching noises behind the wood panelling attributed to him, though the guide emphasised that in such an old property weird noises were only to be expected. (Pers. comm., 26 April 2011; see also accounts by James Wentworth Day in *Country Life*, 1 Dec 1966 and *In Search of Ghosts*, 1967).

Shadowy forms and the chattering monkeys supposedly disturbed a Carlton TV crew in 1998 filming in Rectory Lane, Datchworth, Hertfordshire, helping establish the village as the most haunted in the county (See "Chattering monkeys and a dozen ghosts", *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 28 Mar 2003). A boat containing a woman and a pet monkey supposedly appears on a lake of several acres near a mansion in Leicestershire, according to *Another Grey Ghost Book* (1915) by Jessie Adelaide Middleton. The phantom lady was said to have been accidentally shot by her duck-hunting husband, the boat sunk and the monkey drowned. Sometime before 1967, a Mr Beer took photographs at Berry Pomeroy Castle, Devon, one of which on being developed showed the unexplained image of a woman in mediæval dress carrying a monkey. Unfortunately Mr Beer gave his photograph to the poet Robert Graves, who was so disturbed by it that he burned it, recalling another mediæval expression, "to lead apes in hell", a term applied to old maids and women deprived of physical love in the prime of life. (Peter Underwood: *Nights in Haunted Houses*, 1994).

Perhaps chimpanzees can sense the death of mates – the equivalent of crisis apparitions? Rosalia Abreu, who achieved the first successful breeding of chimpanzees in captivity, recorded several incidents where chimps screamed piteously, seemingly sensing at a distance the death of mates, stating, "It made my flesh creep". (RM Yerkes: *Almost Human*, 1926, cited in Lyall Watson: *The Romeo Error*, 1975).

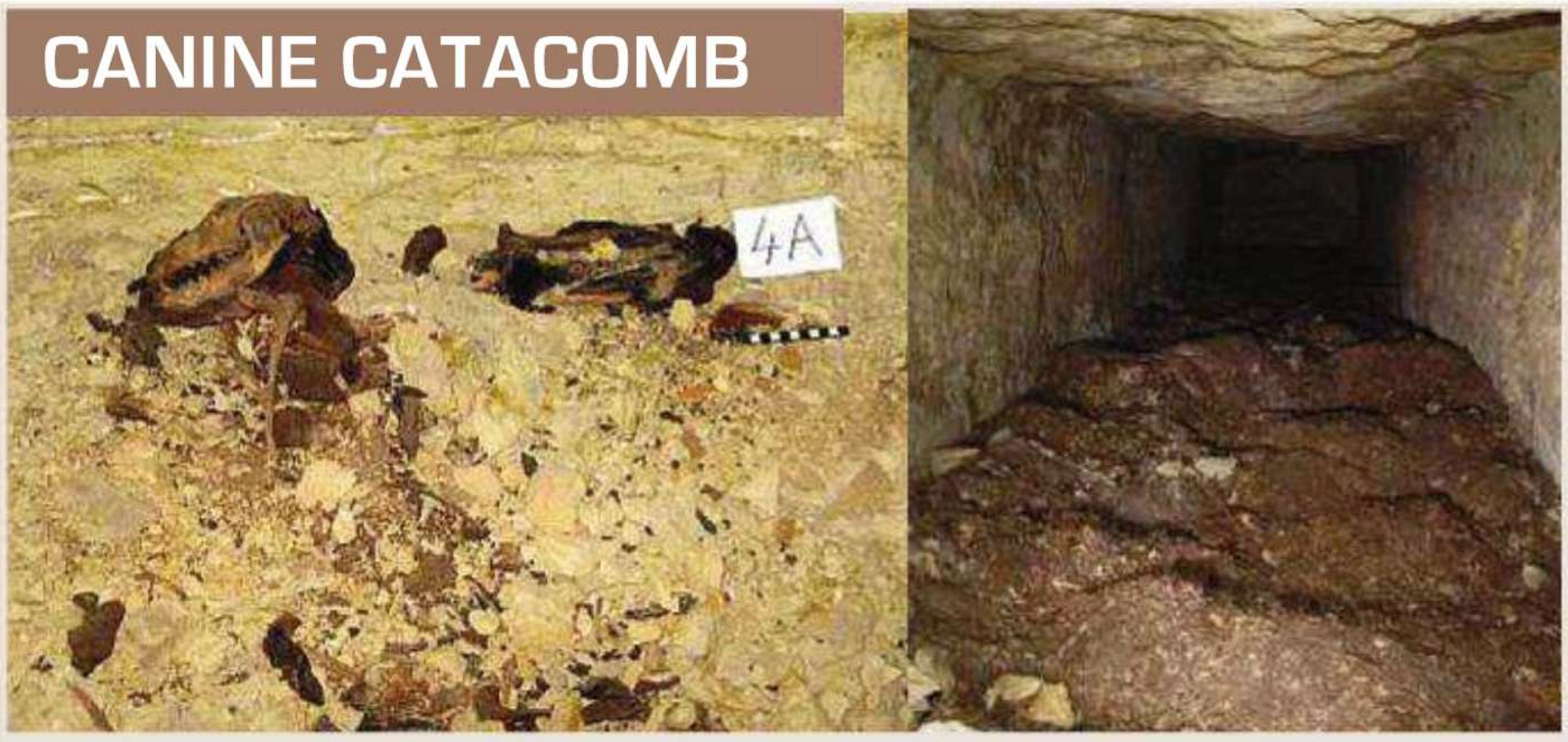


MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING reports on a vast number of mummified dogs found beneath the Egyptian desert, trying times for an archæological celebrity, and the earliest known evidence of metalworking.

CANINE CATACOMB



COURTESY DR PAUL T NICHOLSON

ABOVE: Skeletal remains of a mummified dog (left) and an underground chamber at the Saqqara complex.

A labyrinth of tunnels containing the mummies of up to eight million dogs has been excavated under the Saqqara desert south of Giza in Egypt. The catacomb lies 10–12m (33–39ft) underground and consists of a long corridor with a series of smaller passages branching off. Mostly built around 500 BC, some of the networks are thought to date back to 747 BC, the beginning of the "late period" in Egyptian history. Limited sampling has enabled the team of archæologists from Cardiff University, led by Dr Paul Nicholson, and their Egyptian colleagues to estimate the number of canine mummies. There are also a few mummies of cats, jackals, foxes and ichneumon (Egyptian mongooses). Some of the dogs were mummified just days or even hours after birth; other more mature animals were interred individually in niches in the tunnel walls. It is thought these latter lived in the temples, where they were treated as living embodiments of the wolf-headed god Anubis [see Alien Zoo **FT273:21**], once the most important god of the dead, though later usurped by Osiris. During the Ptolemaic period, Anubis was merged with the Greek god Hermes, becoming Hermanubis, who lived on in the alchemical and hermetic literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

With the need to mummify so many animals – perhaps thousands a year – the dogs were probably bred in farms dotted around the ancient capital of Memphis. Pilgrims paid for dogs to be mummified in the hope of currying favour with Anubis, who oversaw the mummification and protection of the dead for their journey into the afterlife. "These animals were not strictly 'sacrificial'," said Dr Nicholson; "rather, the dedication of an animal mummy was regarded as a pious act, with the animal acting as an intermediary between the donor and the gods."

The labyrinth was first discovered in 1897, and a small tunnel dug to remove some mummies; but Dr Nicholson's team is the first to examine the tunnels in detail. The dog catacomb is the larger of two in the area; the Saqqara desert also contained catacombs stuffed with embalmed bulls, cows, baboons, ibises, hawks and cats. It is thought that the practice of animal embalming died out after the Roman conquest in 30 BC.

"There are newspaper reports of cat mummies being brought into Liverpool to use as fertiliser," said Dr Nicholson, "and it is likely that some of the dog mummies went the same way – although not necessarily to Liverpool." One consignment of 180,000 embalmed cats, weighing 19 tons, was bought in Egypt – presumably sometime in the late 19th century – for 70 shillings and ninepence a ton and sent to Liverpool for fertiliser; another consignment of 28 tons arrived in Liverpool in February 1890. *FT* correspondent Peter Christie suggested this might explain the occasional finds of small Egyptian artefacts in the English countryside [**FT50:76**]. *D.Mirror, 30 Mar; dailymail.co.uk, 31 Mar; South Wales Echo, 2 April 2011*.

TRIBULATIONS FOR HAWASS

The career of Zahi Hawass, 63, (below) the man in charge of Egypt's antiquities, has suffered some tumultuous ups and downs in recent months. On 31 January, the now-disgraced former president Hosni Mubarak appointed him Minister for Antiquities, a newly created cabinet post. On 3 March, in the face of mounting public opposition, he was forced to stand down, but 27 days later he was re-appointed by interim Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, despite continuing accusations of corruption and incompetence – Hawass's own explanation for this is that "no one else can do the job".

What were once rumours (that antiquities have gone missing, only to turn up in the possession of rich acquaintances of Hawass; and that the disappearance of precious items during the recent protests was staged by Hawass and his colleagues) have become public accusations, mainly from sections of the Egyptian archæological community. The apparent looting of artefacts from the Cairo Museum during the protests has certainly given him a few problems. First, he denied that anything had gone missing; then he said over 1,000 artefacts were unaccounted for; then the looted items started turning up in very odd places (metro stations, shopping bags in the museum foyer). At the same time, stories have been circulating on the Internet that he faked the Gantenbrink's Door 'discovery' broadcast live from the Great Pyramid by National Geographic's Television channel.

On 17 April, he was sentenced to a one-year jail term in a case about the granting of a bookshop franchise in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The next day, the National Council of Egypt's Administrative Court issued a decree quashing the conviction (apparently on the strength of a personal representation by Hawass himself). Meanwhile, he has courted further trouble by giving his name to a brand of clothing which uses images of Hawass, and famous Egyptian antiquities, in its marketing. The clothing is marketed by some of the same people who were involved in the bookshop debacle.

Hawass has maintained a façade of blustering confidence during his public tribulations, but respected commentators in Egypt and further afield are suggesting that his days in power are numbered. Many Egyptologists will not be sorry to see him go; Hawass has been the only source of permission for explorations of Egypt's ancient sites, and most have found such permission hard to come by.

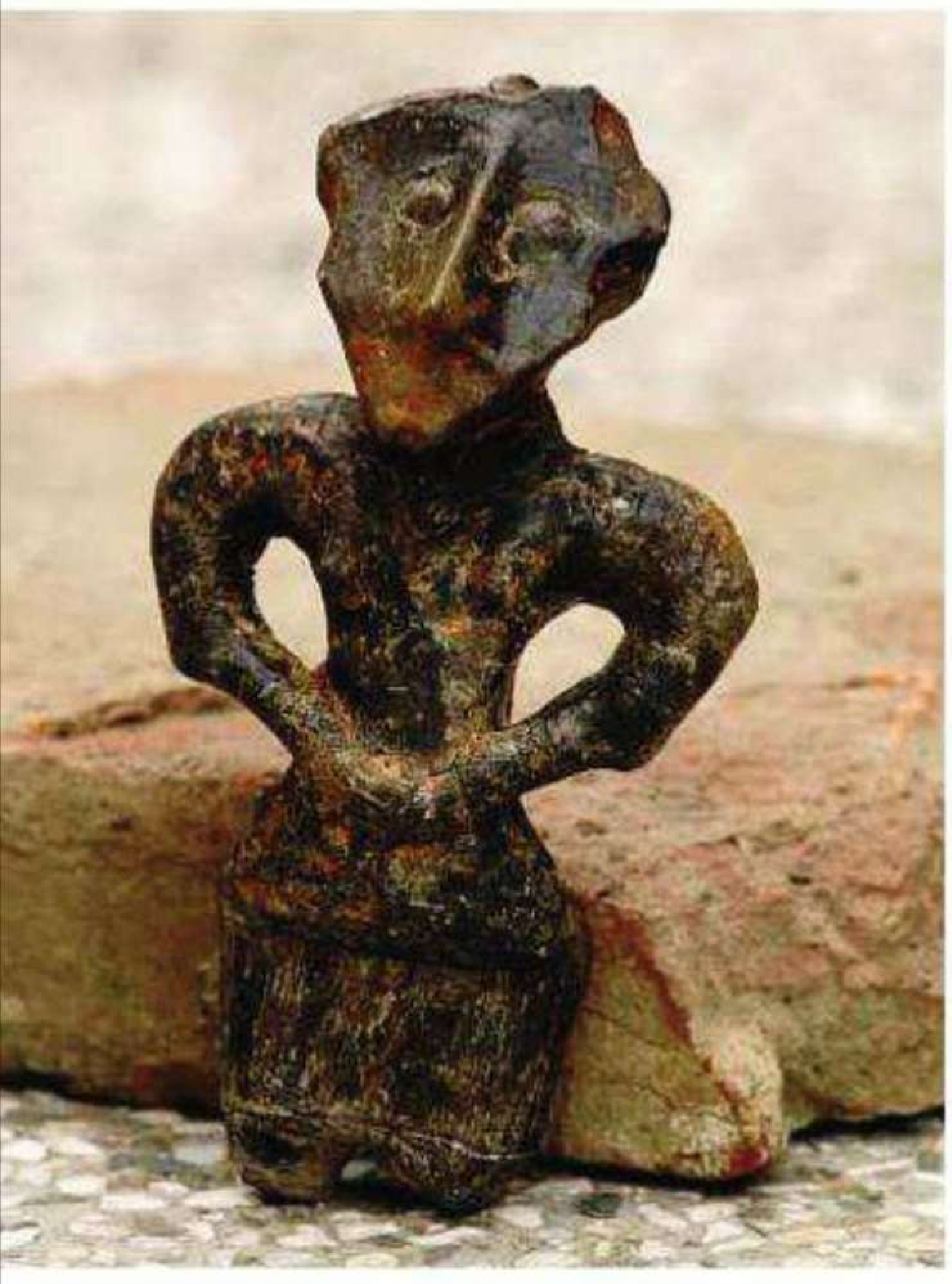
Is the field of Egyptology about to open up for previously frustrated researchers? And what now for the self-styled Indiana Jones of Egyptology? *africanaonline.com, 22 April; ahram online, 18+23 April; Al-Masry Al-Youm, 17+24 April; Washington Post, 23 April; newsflavor.com, 19 April; Asian Age, 17+19+22+23 April 2011*.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP

EARLIEST COPPER-WORKING

A cache of copper axes, hammers, hooks and needles, found in a settlement at Plocnik in Serbia, are 7,500 years old, making them the earliest evidence of metalworking in the world, up to 800 years older than any previous find. The site, near Prokuplje and 125 miles (200km) south of Belgrade, was discovered by railway builders in 1927, but no excavating was done until 1996. It was settled for about 800 years before being burnt down and abandoned in about 5000 BC. The remains of primitive copper smelters were recently found not far away, near today's mines and smelters in Majdanpek and Bor.

Scientists had previously believed that the mining and working of copper began in Asia Minor, but the Plocnik finds suggest that these skills were developed in several locations, perhaps simultaneously. The site, buried under several metres of soil, is believed to cover some 300 acres (120ha). Serbian archæologists have so far exposed three houses, the largest, measuring 26 by 16ft (8x5m) discovered last year. "These people were not wild," said the archæologist in charge of the excavations, Julka Kuzmanovic-Cvetkovic. "They had finely combed hair and adorned themselves with necklaces." One statue of a woman shows her wearing some sort of mini skirt. Others wore long and broad scarves. *Discovery Online, 15 Nov 2010.*



REUTERS / STEVEN LAZAREVIC

ABOVE: Neolithic copper figurine of a girl in a short shirt and ornate top, found in Plocnik.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

139. A WORD IN YOUR SHELLIKE

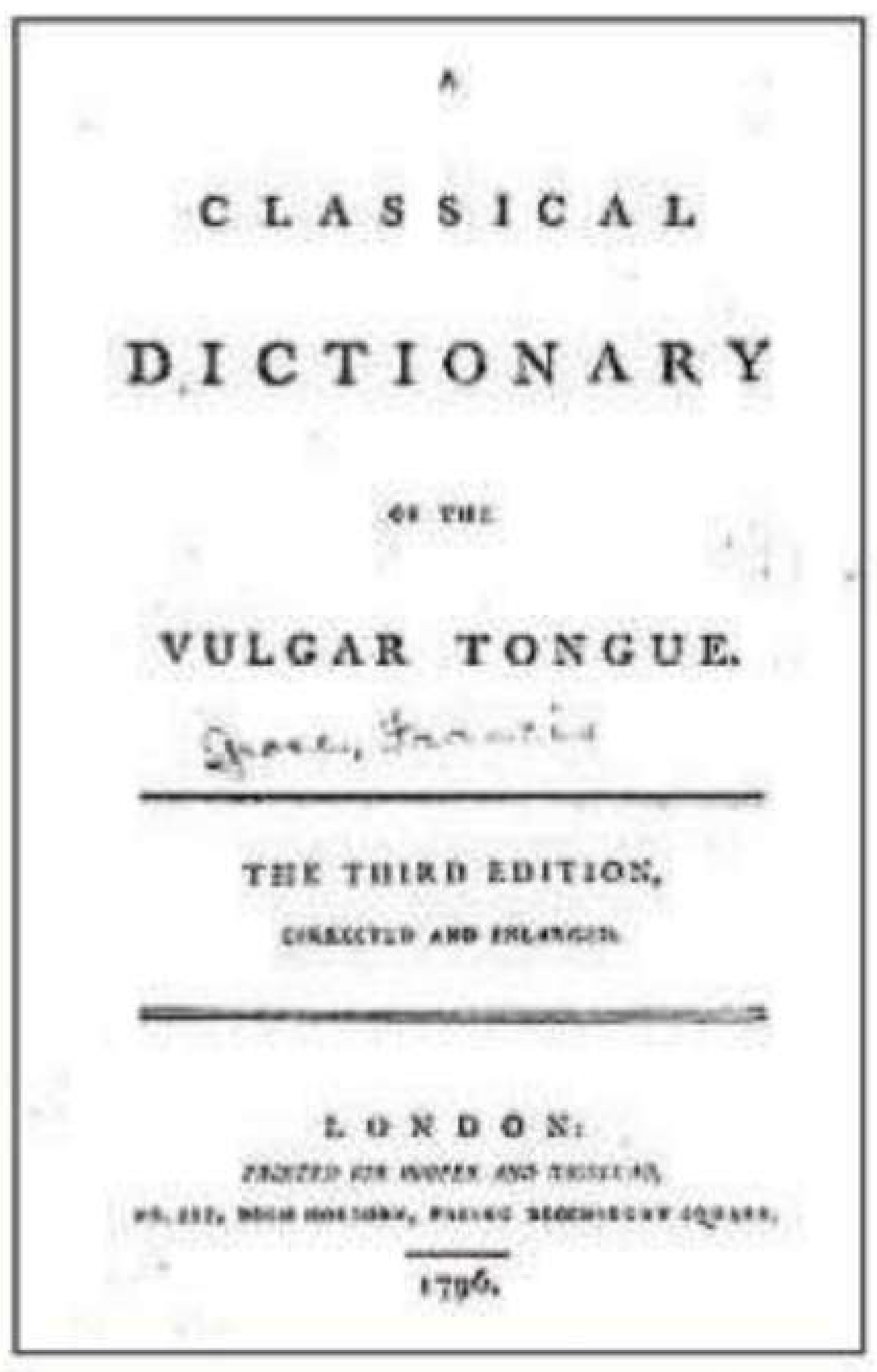
Polonius: What do you read, my lord?

Hamlet: Words, words, words. (*Hamlet* 2.2.195)

Another of my periodic flits to the 18th century. Orwell remarked that slang tells you a lot about its users, supplementing (*Down and Out in Paris and London*, ch32) with a glossary of London argot. My present conduit is Captain Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1796, edited by Eric Partridge (1931); for more on Grose – among other things a great friend of Robert Burns, cf. my articles in *Verbatim* 27.2 (2002), p20, & 28.3 (2003), p22. The following rubrics and definitions are Grose's, the scholia mine.

ABRAM MEN: Lunatics who were on certain days allowed to go begging – their version of Care in the Community?

BALLUM RANCUM: A dance where the women are all prostitutes. The company dance in their birthday suits – ever seen in King's Cross or Soho?



A

CLASSICAL

DICTIONARY

OF THE

VULGAR TONGUE.

Grose, Francis

THE THIRD EDITION,

CORRECTED AND ENLARGED.

LONDON:

1796.

BANK'S HORSE: A horse famous for playing tricks – mentioned by (e.g.) Ben Jonson and Sir Walter Raleigh, identified with the equine Morocco in Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost*.

BELLY PLEA: Plea of pregnancy adduced by female felons capitally convicted, which they take care to provide for previous to their trials; every gaol having one or more child-getters, who qualify the ladies for that expedient – Down to the Job Centre, lads…

BUCKINGER'S BOOT: Matthew Buckinger was born without hands and legs, notwithstanding which he drew coats of arms very neatly, and could write the Lord's Prayer within the compass of a shilling – one thinks of Christie Brown.

CHALKERS: Men of wit in Ireland, who in the night amuse themselves with cutting inoffensive passengers across the face with a knife – cf. the mysterious poisoned-pin wielders in Dio Cassius's *Roman History* (bk57 ch11 para6 – **FT129:51**) and Fort, *Books*, pp884–91.

CUNDUM: Grose credits Captain Cundum from Charles II's reign for inventing "machines worn in the act of coition to prevent venereal infection" – Boswell's *London Journal* abounds in these. Durex (so to speak) is a johnny-cum-lately. The largest size was called a 'bishop' (imagination boggles). Somehow, a certain Mrs Phillips at the Green Canister in Half-Moon Street had acquired a monopoly on these devices, possibly in partnership with the Mrs Goadby who ran "a very well conducted house" (Grose, under SERAGLIO) in Berwick Street, Soho.

DAVID'S SOW (sc. As drunk as): Grose traces this expression to a Welsh publican at Hereford whose living six-legged sow was a local attraction, as was his tippling wife who often slept with it when soused.

EVANS: Mrs Evans, a name frequently given to a she-cat; owing to a witch of the name Evans, who frequently assumed the appearance of a cat – Evans Above!

FEAGUE: To put ginger up a horse's fundament, and formerly a live eel, to make him lively – beats anything Dick Francis came up with.

GARRET ELECTION: Grose's explanation is too long to cite verbatim. It describes the "ludicrous mock elections" held near Wandsworth in tandem with real ones, qualification for voting being restricted to men "who had enjoyed a woman in the open air in that district" – this would do something to combat modern voter apathy, especially as it was subsidised by the local pubs.

GRANNY: The name of an ideot (*sic*), famous for licking her eye, who died 14 Nov 1719 – she must have been a right tongue-twister.

IRISH APRICOTS: Grose's long notice asserts "dipping in the river Shannon totally annihilates bashfulness" – so that explains the likes of Brendan Behan, perhaps also Iris Robinson.

KEMP's MORRIS: William Kemp, said to be the original Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*, danced a morris from London to Norwich in nine days – quite puts ballroom dancing in the shade.

PATRICO, or PATER COVE: Strolling priests who marry people under a hedge without gospel or prayer book, the couple standing on each side of a dead beast – the C of E might bring back its congregations with similar gimmicks.

WELCH RABBIT: The 'Welch' are said to be so remarkably fond of cheese, that in cases of difficulty their midwives apply a piece of toasted cheese to the *janua vitæ*, to attract and entice the young Taffy, who on smelling it makes most vigorous efforts to come forth – these Celtic obstetrics are surely one for AA Gill.

(One can extract similar dividends from other dictionaries, e.g. Samuel Johnson on RETROMINGENCY: Staling backwards, as hares apparently do – do they? Were these retro-pissers hares apparent? Also, Lewis & Short's Latin Dictionary, containing such gems as SELLARIUS: One that practises lewdness upon a settle – Quick, what's a settle?)

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

FURTHER DETAILS ON STORIES PREVIOUSLY REPORTED IN *FT*

WELLINGTON GREY / CC ATTRIBUTION 3.0

PHALLIC DONATION [FT135:26]

Fortean Times
DOOMSDAY

A 95-year-old Icelander has left his penis to one of the world's strangest museums. The late Pall Arason's pickled member has pride of place in the Phallological Museum in the tiny Icelandic fishing town of Husavik, where it has joined an extensive collection of phalluses from whales, seals, bears and other mammals. Arason was a former tourism worker who died on 5 January 2011 in the town of Akureyri, and his organ was officially installed in a ceremony in early April. Several people had pledged their peckers over the years – including an American, a Briton, and a German – but Arason's was the first to be successfully donated. "I have been waiting for this guy for 15 years," said museum curator Sigurdur Hjartarson.

Hjartarson, 69, said his interest in what he calls "phallology" began when, as a youngster in rural Iceland, he was given a whip made from a bull's pizzle to help him herd cattle. Later, when he worked at a school near a whaling station, colleagues brought him whale penises as gifts. He started the museum 15 years ago in Reykjavik with 62 specimens, before moving to Husavik, a small community better known for its whale-watching. The museum is an important part of the region's tourist industry, bringing in thousands of visitors every summer. Hjartarson now has 276 exhibits, many suspended in formaldehyde or dried and mounted on the walls. Highlights include a 67in (170cm) sperm whale member, lampshades made from bull testicles and an "unusually big" penis bone from a Canadian walrus. *[AP] 12 April 2011.*

SACRIFICED BOY IDENTIFIED [FT155:29]

FORTEAN TIMES

A young African boy, whose bloodless, headless and limbless torso, dressed in orange shorts, was found floating in the Thames near Tower Bridge on 21 September 2001, has apparently been identified. The six-year-old, called Adam by detectives, was a Nigerian called Ikpomwosa, according to the woman who cared for him before he disappeared. An investigation tracked down Joyce Osiagede, a mother of two, now in Lagos, who was first questioned by police in Glasgow in 2002. She had looked after the boy for a year while living in Germany as a favour for a friend, a woman who was not the boy's mother, but who was about to be repatriated to Nigeria. She then gave him to a man she called Bawa, who took him to London. He later told her the boy was dead and threatened to kill her unless she kept silent. "They used him for a ritual in the water," she said. She denied being involved in his death. Analysis of a substance in the boy's stomach included toxic calabar beans and tiny clay pellets containing small particles of pure gold, an indication that he was a victim of a muti ritual killing. *D.Mail, 29 Mar, 9 April; D.Express, Metro, Sun, 29 Mar 2011.*

HOLY THORN RECOVERS [FT272:8]

ForteanTimes
PSYCHIC SPIES

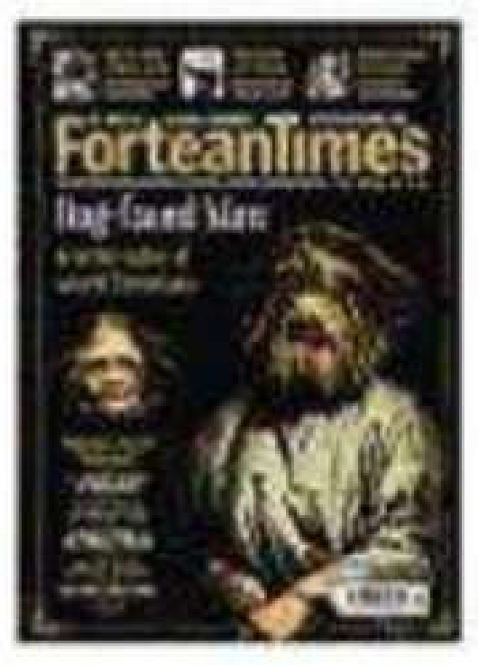
The 'holy' thornbush on Wearyall Hill in Glastonbury, Somerset, felled by vandals on 8 December 2010, began to show new buds at the end of March. Appropriately, the resurrection took place in time for Easter. The council enlisted the help of Peter Frearson, a self-styled pagan wizard with his own horticultural business. "We applied a dressing of pine resin and beeswax to stop further moisture and rain getting in, keep out bacteria and fungus, and apply nutrients," he said. "We covered it in horticultural fleece, then bubble wrap, then more fleece. Soon after, we replaced the bubble wrap with hessian. We mulched around the base of the tree with well-rotted woodchip to keep the moisture off the ground, and we've also driven spikes into the ground and filled the holes with compost and bonemeal, and we'll do it again soon." The mayor said the new buds were "wonderful news for the town". *D.Mail, 26 Mar 2011.*

HACKNEY HOARD [FT273:10]

ForteanTimes

The glass jar containing 80 American Double Eagle $20 coins found by Terrence Castle in his garden in Stoke Newington, northeast London, turned out to be the savings of Jewish refugee Martin Sulzbacher, who bought them in Germany before bringing them to England. His family hid the coins after he was sent abroad in 1940 amid fears that invading Germans would raid bank vaults; but they were killed in the Blitz and took the coins' whereabouts to the grave. Mr Sulzbacher died in 1981, so the coins were handed to his 81-year-old son Max, traced to his home in Jerusalem by the Inner North London coroner's office. He planned to put them up for auction and use the £80,000 to £90,000 they were expected to fetch on restoring his family's graves in Enfield, north London, after giving Mr Castle a small reward. *Metro, 19 April 2011.*

BOWNESSIE [FT274:4]



Five days after Tom Pickles photographed something with humps in Windermere on 11 February, Brian and June Arton from Hovingham, North Yorkshire, spotted something unusual in the water while staying at the Beech Hill Hotel off Newby Bridge Road. "We'd just checked into our hotel room at around 4pm when I opened the veranda doors and saw something about 300 yards [275m] away in the middle of the lake," said Mr Arton. "I joked to my wife: 'There's the Loch Ness Monster' as it had humps, but I thought it had to be a pontoon or a very strange-shaped buoy. It wasn't until we saw the *Westmorland Gazette* the next day that we realised that it could have been a sighting of Bownessie." The Artons watched it for a while and then carried on with their unpacking. It was perfectly still, "as if coming up for air". When they went back onto their balcony a few minutes later, it had gone. "I know people are sceptical," said Mr Arton, "but what I saw was very clear undulating shapes against the background of the water."

One elderly fisherman on the lake, who wishes to remain anonymous, said: "About three years ago, I was sailing on my boat when a huge black slippery creature came up next to me and rolled over like a huge slab of meat. In 20 years on the lake I'd never seen anything like that before. It gave me the creeps." *Westmorland Gazette, 24 Feb, 17 Mar 2011.*

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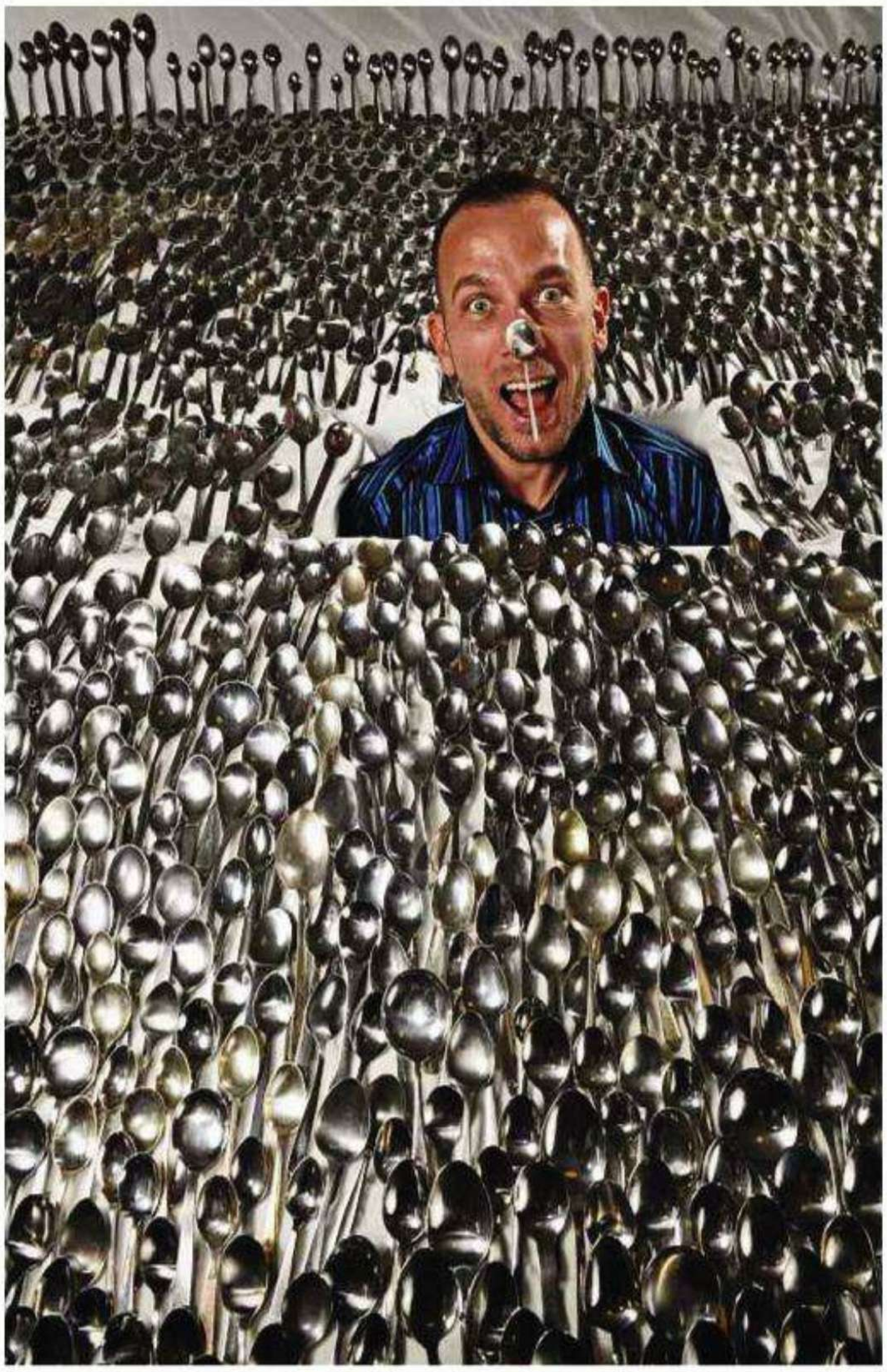
ODD COLLECTORS

It takes all sorts to fill an album or stack a shelf... or take plastic women on vacation around the world

ANDY HAIN / WWW.TOTALREWIND.ORG

HOCKING HILLS TOURISM ASSOCIATION



SOLENT NEWS / MIKAEL BUCK

VIDEO PLAYERS

Andy Hain, 47 (above left), has built up the world's largest collection of video players. The father of three, from Southwick, West Sussex, has more than 100 VCRs from around the world, worth £20,000. These include some of the earliest models, dating back to the 1960s. He keeps his collection, which he started in 1993, in a specially heated garden shed. "People think I'm mad," he said. "My wife Andrea does not understand. I find them interesting from a technological point of view and as cultural artefacts." *D.Mirror, 23 May 2011*.

SPOONS

Dieter Kapsch, a 38-year-old Austrian flight attendant (bottom left), has a collection of 1,760 airline spoons from 447 airlines. One of his oldest is from Imperial Airways, a British company that ran from 1924 to 1939, and he also has one from the *China Clipper*, a Pan Am flying boat of the 1930s. "My friends love my collection

BARCROFT MEDIA

HOCKING HILLS TOURISM ASSOCIATION

and they're very supportive – they have added to it a lot," he said. "I hope there will be some more coming." *Metro, 22 Oct 2010*.

PENCIL SHARPENERS

Ohio tourism officials have unveiled a display of 3,400 pencil sharpeners collected by a local cleric who died recently. The Rev. Paul Johnson kept his collection (examples facing, top right) in a small shed (above) at his house in Logan, but following his death it was moved to a local community centre. Johnson started collecting after his wife gave him a pencil sharpener as a gift in the late 1980s. The oldest dates from 1906. *MX News (Sydney), 17 May 2011*.

PLASTIC WOMEN

Dave Hockey, a 57-year-old 'iDollator", has spent £16,000 travelling the world accompanied by life-size replica women. He has pictures of himself posing with his artificial friends at Stonehenge (facing, bottom right), the Grand Canyon and Niagara Falls; he has taken them riding, sky-diving, and for a spin on the back of a Harley-Davidson. "My wife understands it is a hobby," said the Canadian father of two. "She isn't threatened by the dolls. She knows I'm not going to run off with an 80lb [36kg] piece of silicone shaped like a woman." Hockey began collecting the adult toys in 2006 and now has 14 with another on order. One deluxe model cost him £2,030. He has spent £1,270 on outfits, bought 18 wigs at £38 each, and bought them all stilettos. *D.Mirror, 25 Jan 2011*.

CATS

Regina Millard, 54, and Bertha Ryan, 61, from Troy, New York State, were living with 77 cats in two cars parked in Bennington, Vermont. On 8 October 2010, following a complaint by a member of the public who had seen the women sleeping in the cars with the cats, police investigated. One cat was dead in the boot of one of the cars. There were plates of food on the car floors and some of the animals had fæcal matter matted to their fur. Apparently, only two of the cats belonged to the women, who were looking for homes for the rest. *[AP] 10 Oct 2010*.

For other odd collectors, see **FT265:18–19**, **268:22**.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

143. CAMEMBERT

Quel
FROMAGE

The myth

Camembert cheese was invented in 1791, in the village of the same name, by milkmaid Marie Harel. As the Terror raged across France, Marie bravely (or treacherously, depending on your point of view) gave shelter to a recusant priest from Brie, the Abbé Bonvoust (or Gobert, in some versions). In return, he taught her the secret process that made Brie cheese unique. By combining Brie techniques with an existing local cheese, Marie created democratic France's national cheese – a revolutionary mixture of old and new.

The "truth"

The priest never existed, say historians; Marie Harel didn't live in Camembert at the time; and there are published mentions of Camembert cheese – or, at least, of *a* Camembert cheese – dating back to the 1680s. The legend of Marie seems to have become popular only in the 1920s, when a grateful American, who believed the cheese had cured his digestive troubles, began a fund to erect a statue to the mythical milkmaid. Scholars suggest that the tale of Marie and the priest served to strengthen the brand identity both of the cheese and the nation itself. In reality, Camembert probably owes its global fame to the invention at the end of the 19th century of the characteristic little wooden box that allowed the cheese to travel safely by rail.

Sources

http://bit.ly/ksCGDP (camembert-france.com);
http://bit.ly/kqJNbo (taste-camembert.com);
http://bit.ly/9wrUFa (guardian.co.uk); *Economist*, 26 July 2003.

Disclaimer

The "traditional" story still has its defenders. If you'd like to whey the evidence and tell us what you think o'curd, please write in.

Mythchaser

This column is always delighted when something that used to be a "myth" becomes a "truth". The old wives' tale that reading on the loo causes hæmorrhoids was supported by a study published in the *Lancet* in 1989. But can anyone say where the idea sits currently – in the "myth" pile or the "truth" pile?

BOTH ILLOS: HUNT EMERSON

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

Apocalypse Not...

TED HARRISON examines the fall-out from the failed End Time prediction of radio evangelist Harold Camping

DAY OF THE
LORD
Judgment Day
May 21
The Bible
Cry mightily

GETTY IMAGES / SPENCER PLATT

Californian radio preacher Harold Camping (below) had predicted that the apocalypse would begin on 21 May 2011, a date he had calculated, he claimed, through Biblical evidence (see **FT269:11, 274:55**). It was to have been signalled by the arrival of The Rapture, in which the Christian faithful would be whisked off to Heaven while five months of punishment was meted out to everyone else before the world officially ended on 21 October.

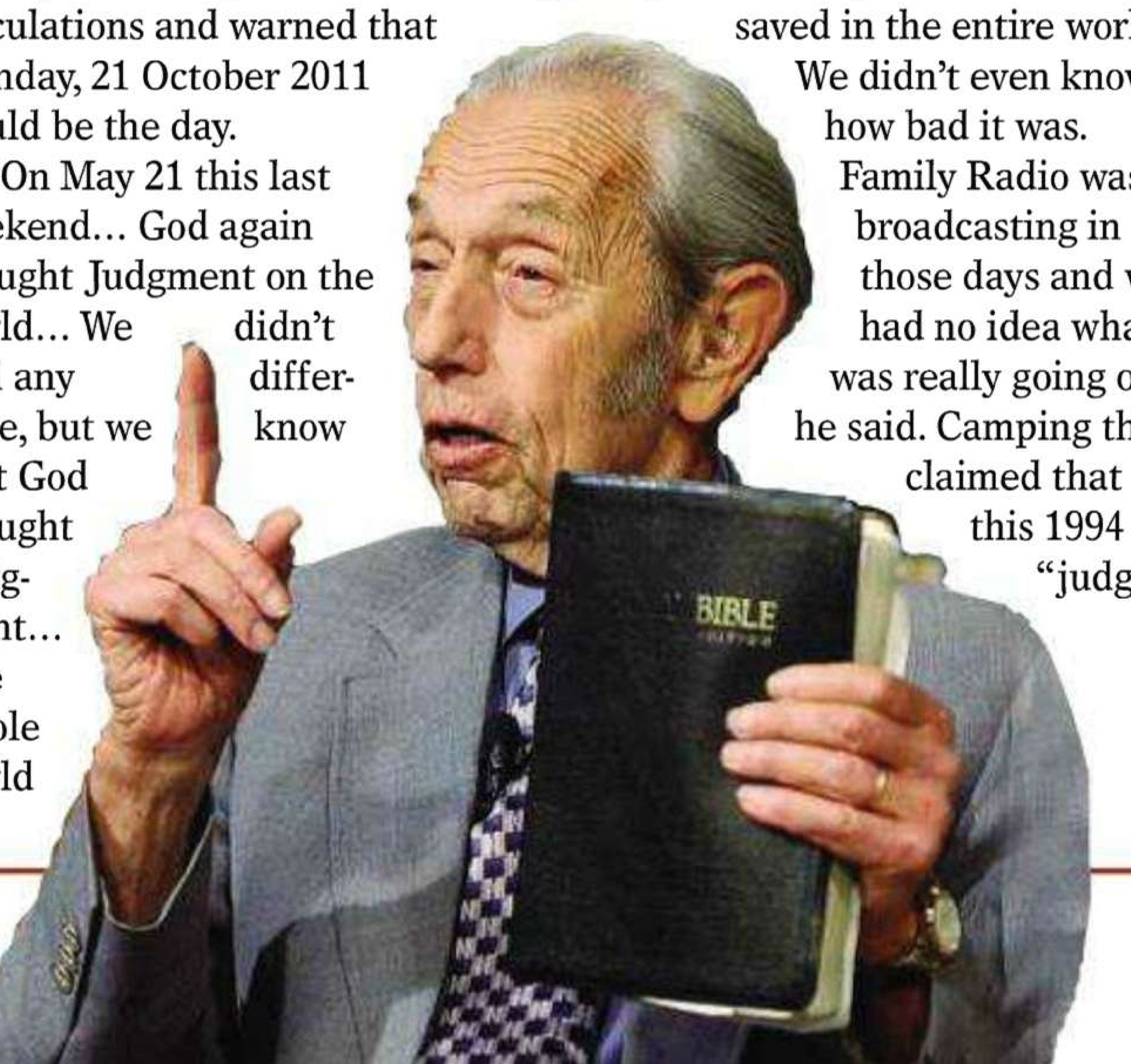
Like many supposed Doomsdays of the past, this one came and went without major catastrophe. Only the Icelandic volcano Grimsvötn blew on cue, as predicted by the 89-year-old radio evangelist. Camping himself spent the day bunkered down at his Californian home as his worldwide network of followers looked for signs of the End.

When the first deadline of 6pm New Zealand time passed quietly, tweets flew around the world saying that the prediction would come true at 6pm Jerusalem time. Eventually, as midnight came and went in the mid-Pacific and 21 May faded into history, Camping's disciples realised something had gone wrong.

Doorstepped at his home the next day, Camping said he was as 'flabbergasted' as everyone else. On Monday, he took to the air at his Family Radio Network to admit that he had miscalculated by five months. Speaking on a live Open Forum, he revised his calculations and warned that Monday, 21 October 2011 would be the day.

"On May 21 this last weekend… God again brought Judgment on the world… We didn't feel any difference, but we know that God brought Judgment… The whole world is under Judgment." He made no attempt to backtrack on any of his previous calculations, not even his previous failed 1994 prophecy. "Actually there are four days that are very crucial at this point in time," he said. "We have talked about all four of these days in the past and we are not making any changes in these four days except for in the emphasis… The first part [of] the end of the world began on May 21, 1988."

Camping then went over dates he deemed important in church history. The next year he pointed to was 1994 – the year he had previously predicted would bring the world's end. "It is true, there was judgment in a terrible way and there was salvation in a wonderful way. The salvation came because in the previous 2,300 days… virtually no one could be saved in the entire world. We didn't even know how bad it was. Family Radio was broadcasting in those days and we had no idea what was really going on," he said. Camping then claimed that this 1994 "judgment" had been "spiritual, not physical", and that Jesus Christ did not arrive on Earth at that time.



PA PHOTOS / AP PHOTO

Camping said he was as flabbergasted as everyone els

Before 21 May, Camping warned that after the Rapture, when the saved would be taken up into Heaven, the next five months on Earth would be a time of disaster and great suffering. Now, he says, the next five months will not be especially difficult and that the Rapture and punishment will happen simultaneously in October.

While some of Camping's followers will accept his recalculations, others are already wondering where it all went wrong. After Camping's failed 1994 prediction saw at least one suicide reported, family and friends of some of Camping's followers have become increasingly anxious.

One of his most dedicated End-Time ambassadors, Marie Exley-Sheahan, who took the message to the Muslim world, posted a final message on Facebook as the last possible deadline expired: "My prayer for family and friends: 'Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.' My hope: 'Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.' Love to all…"

Nine hours later, her family made a desperate plea via Facebook for her to contact them: "Marie your Dad and I love u and will always We only ask u to think about this: Matthew 24:36… NO ONE EXCEPT GOD KNOWS THE DAY AND HOUR OF JESUS RETURN TO EARTH. IF JESUS DIDN'T KNOW ISN'T IT CRAZY TO THINK SOMEONE ON EARTH KNOWS? PLEASE CALL."

Another friend reported trying unsuccessfully to email Marie. Twenty hours after Marie's last posting, another friend posted, "Where o where is my friend Marie?? I love you girl, call or text." On Tuesday Marie Exley eventually broke her silence by posting on Facebook: "I am totally ok, alive and it is well with my soul… thank you all for your love, care and support…"

Dave and Anne Kellar, a couple who had produced their own warning leaflets to distribute in their home city of Manchester, spent Saturday at home. "We're still here," Dave said on Monday. "We've had some hassle and we are going to have a rethink of direction. One day what the Bible says will happen. Fortunately we didn't give any money to Family Radio."

End Time predictions are not a new phenomenon, but the Harold Camping prophecy will probably be judged to be one of the most widely reported in history, thanks to modern travel and the Internet. Followers of William Miller in 1844 were variously estimated to number between 50,000 and 500,000. One YouTube site explaining Camping's Bible calculations attracted almost 2,000,000 viewers.

Sources: Personal interviews, Facebook posts and Camping's Family Radio broadcast.

FAILED DOOMSDAY PREDICTIONS

Harold Camping can take some comfort from the fact that the non-arrival of the predicted Rapture on 21 May is just the latest in a long line of unfulfilled prophecies concerning the End of the World…

10 OCTOBER 1533

Using the Book of Revelation, German monk and mathematician Michael Stifel calculated that the world would end on this day. When nothing actually happened, Stifel was beaten up.

5 APRIL 1761

London was rocked by earthquakes in February and March. Soldier William Bell noted that four weeks elapsed between the quakes and predicted the destruction of the world 28 days later. After the date had passed, he was thrown into Bedlam.

19 OCTOBER 1814

The celebrated prophetess Joanna Southcott said that on this day she would bear the Second Messiah, known as Shiloh, and the world would end. In fact, she wasn't even pregnant, and died 10 days after her deadline.

3 APRIL & 7 JULY 1843; 21 MAR & 22 OCT 1844

William Miller, a New York farmer, announced the Day of Judgement on three successive dates. His followers, the Second Adventists or Millerites, gathered on hilltops in their thousands. By one estimate, one in every 85 Americans succumbed to the hysteria. After the Disappointment, as it was known, some Millerites founded the Seventh-Day Adventists.

13 NOVEMBER 1900

The Brothers and Sisters of Red Death, a 200-year-old Russian sect, forbade marriage but allowed sexual intercourse provided the sinners were immediately suffocated with a large red cushion. Believing the world would end on 12 November, 862 members decided to have themselves burned to death. 100 succeeded before the authorities arrived.

6 FEBRUARY 1925

Margaret Rowan, a Reformed Seventh-Day Adventist from Los Angeles, announced that the Archangel Gabriel had told her the world would end at midnight on this day and 144,000 would be taken up in the Rapture. The faithful gathered on rooftops across America and chanted "Gabriel! Gabriel! Gabriel!"

21 SEPTEMBER 1945

It was revealed to Rev. Charles Long of Pasadena that, on this day at 5.33pm the Earth would be vaporised and all humanity turned into ectoplasm. He wrote a 70,000-word tract expounding his prophecy. His followers gave up food, drink and sleep a week before the deadline.

14 JULY 1960

Elio Blanco, an Italian paediatrician, said the world would be destroyed by the secret American 'E' bomb on this day at 1.45pm. With the help of 45 followers, he built a 15-room ark 7,000ft (2,100m) up Mont Blanc.

31 MARCH 1999

Taiwanese national Dr Hon-Ming Chen moved his God's Salvation Church to Garland, Texas, because he thought it sounded like "god land". From here, God would announce his return on TV on 25 March, reincarnate in Dr Chen's body on 31 March and prepare for Earth's nuclear destruction in August 1999, when the lucky few would be rescued by flying saucers. God failed to appear on TV or take over Chen's body. "I would rather you don't believe what I say anymore," said the failed messiah.

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON…

OBAMA, THE MUSLIMS AND A MUSICAL CONSPIRACY

Only five days before the series of contradictory and crudely spin-doctored American announcements about Osama Bin Laden's death (see **FT276:8–9**), the White House released the so-called 'long form' of President Obama's birth certificate from Hawaii in an attempt to quash the conspiracy theories of the "birthers" who do not believe Obama was born in the US and is thus not entitled to be president. (The 2008 release of the so-called 'short form' had done nothing to quiet the "birthers".)

Some of the "birthers", of course, were not persuaded. Analyses purporting to show that it is a Photoshop fabrication appeared almost immediately.[1] For others, who believe that Obama was born in Kenya, deconstructing the Hawaii certificate is almost irrelevant. Both groups are producing material as impenetrable as Kennedy assassination buffs discussing the forensic evidence.

On the paranoids' left wing, former US intelligence officer Wayne Madsen, whose earlier account of Obama-as-CIA I referred to in this column last year (**FT267:27**), has produced his own long form version of it.[2] Although entirely circumstantial, this looked quite plausible until he identified someone as a CIA officer because he was so named "in a 1968 book, *Who's Who in the CIA*, published in West Berlin". Now, I have a photocopy of that book somewhere and it is a well-known product of East German intelligence (it even has a Wiki entry). Describing it as "published in West Berlin" is a deception, which reminds me why I never trust Madsen.

Staying with Obama, there is the theory (if "theory" isn't too grand a term for it), sourced back to "a senior United Nations official", that the US will be a Muslim country by the end of Obama's second term. It's going to work like this:

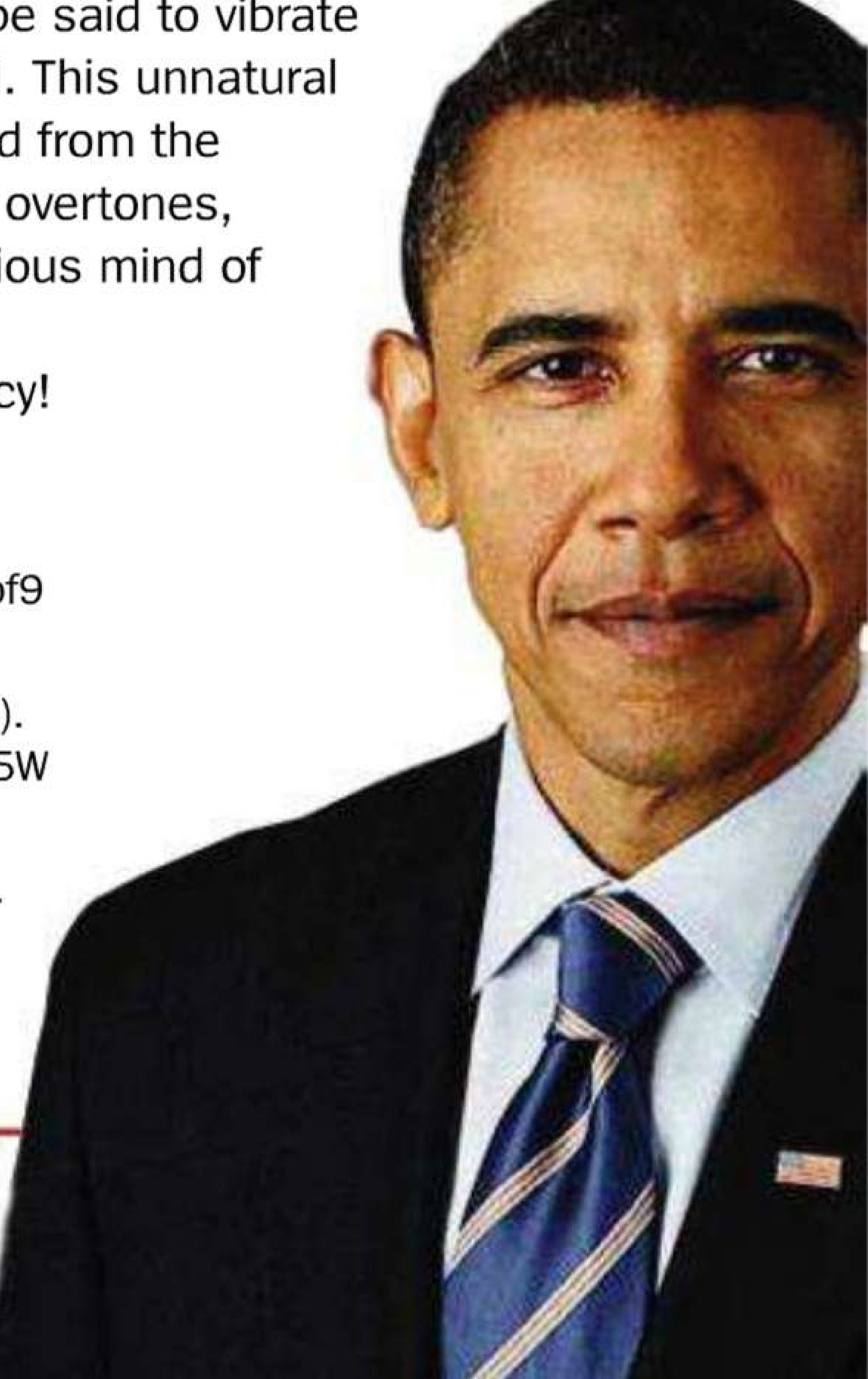
"The Moslem world is saying that President Obama wants amnesty for the current Hispanic 12 million illegal immigrants in the US in order to pave the way for the next wave of tens of millions of illegals from the Middle East to the United States, leading to 50 to 100 million Muslims living in the US before the end of Obama's second term, which will be brought forth by these new US citizens voting for their saviour, Obama."[3]

At least 50 million flyers from the Middle East to the US in four years? My advice is to buy airline shares now!

As the source of the above is a translator in the office of the Prime Minister of Israel, we might suspect a political motive at work.

From the ridiculous to the even more ridiculous: did you know that sound harmonics divisible by three produce "symmetry, and visually harmonic, pleasing structures"? I confess I didn't. Unfortunately for all of us, "[A]n incredibly powerful, wealthy person who secretly prospers from conflict, disease and war learned that certain sound frequencies (those easily divisible by two, signifying opposition) create conflict, discord and disharmony". Thus it was "in September 1939 when Rockefeller (Illuminati) financial interests dictated that the standard tuning for the note of 'A' above middle C would henceforth be said to vibrate at precisely 440 cycles per second. This unnatural standard tuning frequency, removed from the symmetry of sacred vibrations and overtones, has declared war on the subconscious mind of Western Man."[4]

Yes, it's the tuning fork conspiracy!



PETE SOUZA, THE OBAMA-BIDEN TRANSITION PROJECT / CC ATTRIBUTION 3.0

NOTES

[1] Try, on the 'fake' side: http://bit.ly/kFOof9 (gatewaypundit.rightnetwork.com).

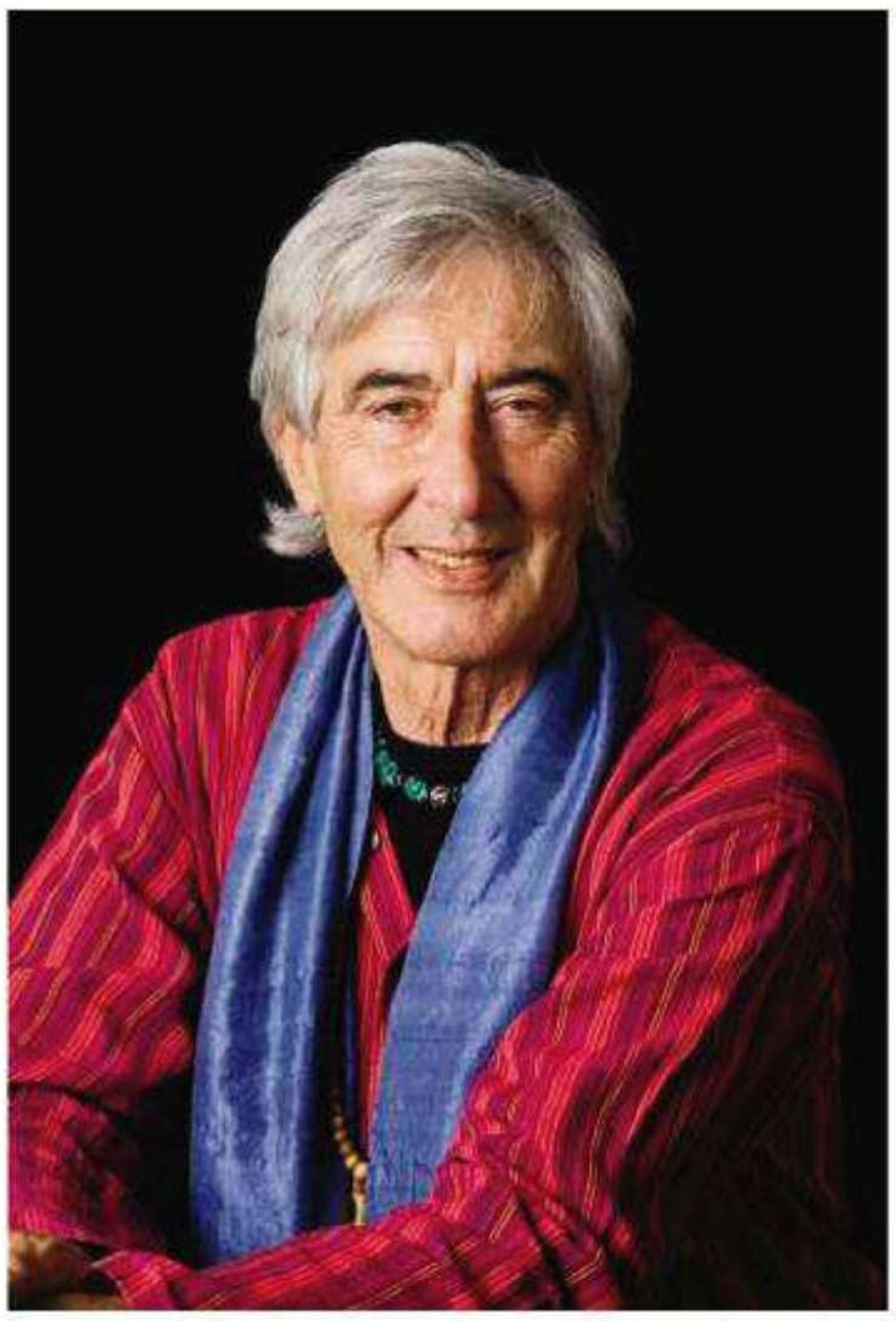
[2] http://bit.ly/agRY7t (veteranstoday.com). The 2010 version is at http://bit.ly/kEWx5W (opinion-maker.org).

[3] http://bit.ly/ffTOIR (specialguests.com).

[4] http://bit.ly/azRaIQ (henrymakow.com).

NECROLOG

We note the passing of an art historian who became a global harmonic spiritual guru, plus of a journalist, ghost-hunter and public relations adviser.



JOSÉ ARGÜELLES

was an art historian who inspired the Harmonic Convergence event of 1987, and predicted a new era starting at the winter solstice on 21 December 2012 – or (if things went pear-shaped) the end of the world. Born Joseph Arguelles in Rochester, Minnesota, to a German American mother and a Mexican father, he lived in Mexico for several years, moving back to Minnesota when he was seven. Wounded by anti-Mexican prejudice, he stopped speaking Spanish and assimilated, a course he maintained until 1953. That year he visited the pyramids of Teotihuacan outside Mexico City and felt a "profound sentiment" to reconnect with his roots, including the Mayan culture.

After studying Art History at the University of Chicago, he went to Paris in the mid-1960s to research a doctorate on Post-Impressionists, took LSD and found he was a visionary. He began to express himself in psychedelic painting, "drawing down the visionary flow from the cosmic realm of endless archetypal form", and switched the subject of his doctorate to Charles Henry, a French "psychomathematician" who had influenced Post-Impressionist painters such as Georges Seurat. He taught briefly at Princeton before moving on to UC Davis in California and later to Washington's Evergreen State University, and obtained his doctorate in 1969. At Davis, he helped organise an "art happening" that led in 1971 to the first Whole Earth Festival, now in its 40th year. At some point, he topped his surname with an umlaut and began calling himself José.

Argüelles (above), who styled himself Valum Votan, Closer of the Cycle and President of the Foundation for the Law of Time, amalgamated ideas from Buckminster Fuller, Tibetan Buddhism, the *I Ching*, the Book of Revelation, von Däniken, and Aztec cosmology. During the New Age boom of the 1980s, he found a new audience for his talk of the "inner wheel of evolutionary directional guardians" and the "bio-electromagnetic battery and sense-field matrix". He claimed to have been inspired by calendars left by Mayans, who were in turn inspired by extraterrestrials from the Galactic Federation. The Mayans, he claimed, tell us we entered our current stage of evolution in 3113 BC when the Earth and Sun began a long journey through an energy beam emanating from the Milky Way.

In 2012, the Solar System would leave the beam: "As the year 2012 approaches, the planet will be humming and vibrating as never before," Argüelles wrote in *The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology* (1987). On a date allegedly determined by the Mayan calendar, he wanted a "critical mass" of 144,000 New Age believers to gather at sacred sites to ground the new vibrational frequencies, bond with the Cosmos and prevent global catastrophe. At sunrise on 16 August 1987, from his eyrie on the slopes of Mount Hood in Oregon, he blew a conch shell 144 times to summon the world's New Age tribes to a Harmonic Convergence. Round the world – at Mt Shasta, Golden Gate Park, Central Park, Sedona (Arizona), Chaco Canyon (New Mexico), Serpent Mound (Ohio), Machu Picchu, Giza, Uluru, Mount Olympus, Glastonbury, the Dead Sea and elsewhere – they gathered and danced, hugged, meditated, formed circles, solar-charged their crystals and chanted "om". Some searched the skies for UFOs. The "Doonesbury" comic strip spoofed the event as the "moronic convergence… sort of a national fruit loops day".

"This is the first Mayan be-in for a long time," Argüelles explained. "Kind of sexy. We represent the hot, luminous tip of a galacto-magnetic vortex." If the energy was to be effective, he said, "it's all a matter of getting with your wave form and harmonising your hologram." Furthermore, "If each one of us remains in our own integrity, we will re-establish the connection with the dream world." According to Argüelles, the root of all discord was the solar Gregorian calendar, which was "programmed for apocalypse", leaving modern man out of sync with the natural cycles of the Earth, resulting in war, conflict, pollution, and general turpitude. He proposed its replacement with a "Dreamspell" lunar calendar of 13 months of 28 days each.

Other books by Argüelles include *Surfers of the Zuvuya: Tales of Interdimensional Travel and Manifesto for the Noosphere* (1988) — an "experiential dialogue" between himself and his "dimensional double", Uncle Joe Zuvuya, as they journeyed from the centre of the Earth to the outer galactic regions. He anticipated a rosier "galactic age" in which people would return to a simpler lifestyle and communicate by telepathy.

Joseph Anthony Arguelles (aka José Argüelles), New Age prophet, born Rochester, Minnesota, 24 Jan 1939; died from peritonitis in the Australian bush 23 Mar 2011, aged 72.

PHILIP PAUL

Philip Paul (below) was one of the most active British ghost-hunters of the 1950s and 1960s. Instrumental in helping revive the Ghost Club in 1954, he excavated the site of Borley Rectory in Essex, infamous as "the most haunted house in England".

Opportunities to pursue the paranormal emerged from his first career in journalism, starting on a provincial newspaper but rapidly moving into Fleet Street thanks to a lucky 'scoop' in June 1944. Effectively left in charge of the weekly *Newmarket Journal* following the sudden death of its editor, he was on the scene within minutes of learning an ammunition train had exploded at nearby Soham, obliterating the station and nearly wiping out the village itself. Finding encouragement in London from the legendary journalist Hannen Swaffer (known as the 'Pope of Fleet Street' for his spiritualist views) he soon became a recognised authority on ghosts and poltergeists in his own right, investigating numerous alleged hauntings around the UK.

A selection of these cases were revisited in his book *Some Unseen Power* (1985), but many more filled the pages of *Psychic News*, to which he was a prolific contributor throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as the mainstream press. He also specialised in crime reporting, covering many major trials at the Old Bailey. Impressed by scientific methods of detection,

he eventually wrote a book dedicated to the work of the National Forensic Science Laboratory entitled *Murder Under the Microscope* (1990). Sometimes combining his fields of expertise, he also exposed fraudulent mediums and charlatans on the psychic scene. This made him unpopular in some circles but gained respect from believers, and he became a frequent if often outspoken lecturer on the spiritualist circuit.

Between 1950 and 1957, he continued the research of the controversial psychical researcher Harry Price (1881–1948) at the site of Borley Rectory, Essex, holding seven annual vigils each on 28 July, the day the ghostly 'nun' of Borley traditionally walked. This progressed into digging up the Rectory site in 1954 with local support and discovering the remains of an earlier 17th-century building. Although later sceptical of many Borley tales, he nonetheless believed genuine phenomena had occurred, regardless of the claims of Price's many detractors. During this period, he also ensured the survival of another Price legacy, helping re-launch the Ghost Club that had folded after Price's death in 1948.

National attention for these activities came in 1953 with an appearance on the popular BBC television show *What's My Line?* where a panel of personalities tried to identify the profession of a mystery guest. His choice of "ghost-hunter" beat them, provoking an irascible team regular Gilbert Harding to declare "You must be barmy!" Despite a press furore, they subsequently became good friends. Ironically, in the closing months of his life Harding asked Philip for advice after hearing the sound of his deceased sister's voice at his London flat.

In later years, Philip became an adviser on public relations for the Post Office and a number of corporations and societies, but took time to follow up the famous 'Amityville Horror' in the USA. Like most investigators, he concluded that it was based on misperception and fraud. He continued to write on paranormal topics up until his own death. At a Ghost Club meeting in 2004, he stated that although the majority of mediums were deluded or fraudulent, a small number did possess unexplained powers. Among these he included one medium who had succeeded in curing him of a serious illness, despite his own arch-scepticism concerning her talents.

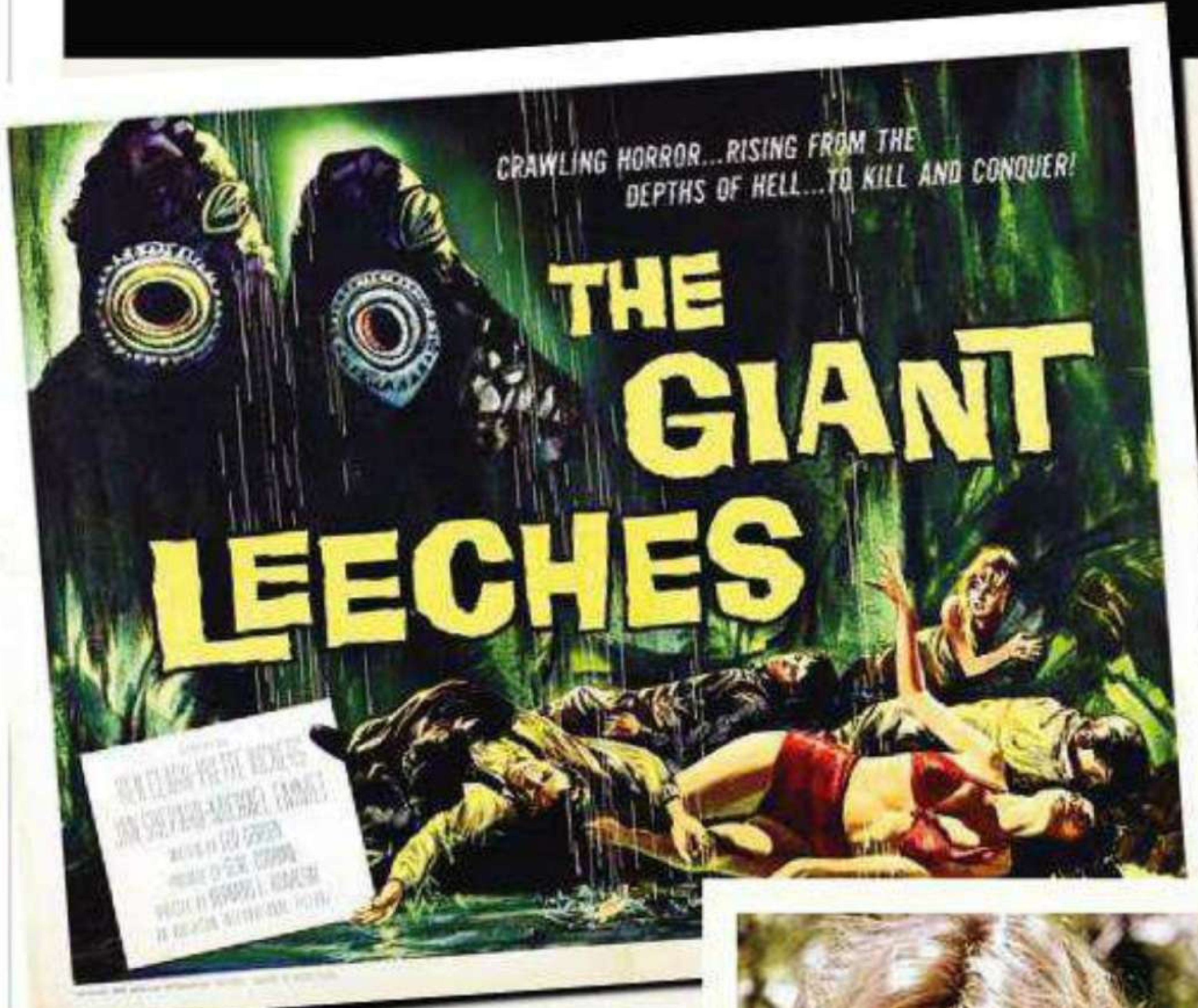
Philip Paul, journalist, PR consultant and ghost-hunter, born 31 Aug 1923; died 12 June 2010.

Alan Murdie

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL


CRAWLING HORROR...RISING FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL...TO KILL AND CONQUER!
THE GIANT LEECHES

THE MUMMIFIED BODY OF YVETTE Vickers, who starred as Honey Parker in the film *Attack Of The 50 Foot Woman* (1958), was found in her house in Beverley Hills, California, on 27 April. The state of the body indicated that Vickers, 82, might have lain there for a year. The grim discovery was made by neighbour Susan Savage, who noticed that letters stuck in the mailbox were yellowing around the edges and that cobwebs had gathered in the doorway. She found the body on the floor of an upstairs room, next to a small heater that was still running.

Vickers was born Yvette Vedder in Kansas City, Missouri, on 26 August 1928, the daughter of jazz musicians. Her first film role was an uncredited cameo in Billy Wilder's 1950 noir classic *Sunset Boulevard*, and she made her big screen debut under her own name in *Short Cut To Hell* (1957), having been spotted by James Cagney. In 1959 she was *Playboy*'s Playmate of the Month for July. She gained distinction by being named one of the worst actresses of all time, but in recent years acquired a new Internet following among connoisseurs of low-budget schlock-horror. In 1959, she starred in *Attack of the Giant Leeches* and in 1989 she joined the punk rock group Nyck Varooms Tomb as a guest artist on their underground hit *Those Leeches Are Crawling All Over Me*. No cause of death has been established. *Metro, D.Mail, Sun, 4 May; D.Telegraph, 13 May 2011*.

JOSEPH NASO, 77, A PETTY THIEF and freelance photographer living in Reno, Nevada, was charged in April with the murder of four women in northern California between 1977 and 1994. He is said to have killed Carmen Colon, Roxene Roggasch, Pamela Parsons and Tracy Tafoya – who had nothing in common apart from their alliterative names. Detectives are trying to find out if Naso had anything to do with New York's "Double Initial Murders" – the killings in the early 1970s of three girls, each with matching initials. Spookily, one of them was also called Carmen Colon. However, authorities admitted that a DNA sample taken from one of the New York victims didn't match Naso's and they have no physical evidence that he was involved in those killings. *Buffalo (NY) News, 14 April; Sun, 15 April 2011.*

AMATEUR FILM-MAKER MARK Twitchell, 31, went on trial in Edmonton, Canada, in March, accused of copying the gory plot of his own horror movie. The prosecution alleged that Twitchell posed as a woman on an Internet dating site in 2008, lured Johnny Altinger, 38, to a garage for a date, killed him, cut him up, dumped his body parts in a sewer and chronicled the crime on his computer. The plot of his movie, which he had completed a week earlier, involved a victim being lured to a garage and then being tortured to death. *MX News (Sydney), 18 Mar; Sun, 22 Mar 2011.*

A MAN WAS SHOT DEAD AT A LATVIAN CINEMA on 19 February after eating his popcorn too loudly during the movie *Black Swan*, starring Natalie Portman. The dispute broke out at Riga's Forum Cinemas complex towards the end of the film, and lawyer Nikolajs Zikovs, 27, shot Aigars Egle, 42, as the credits rolled. *telegraph.co.uk, 21 Feb; Sydney Morning Herald, 24 Feb 2011.*

the UFO files

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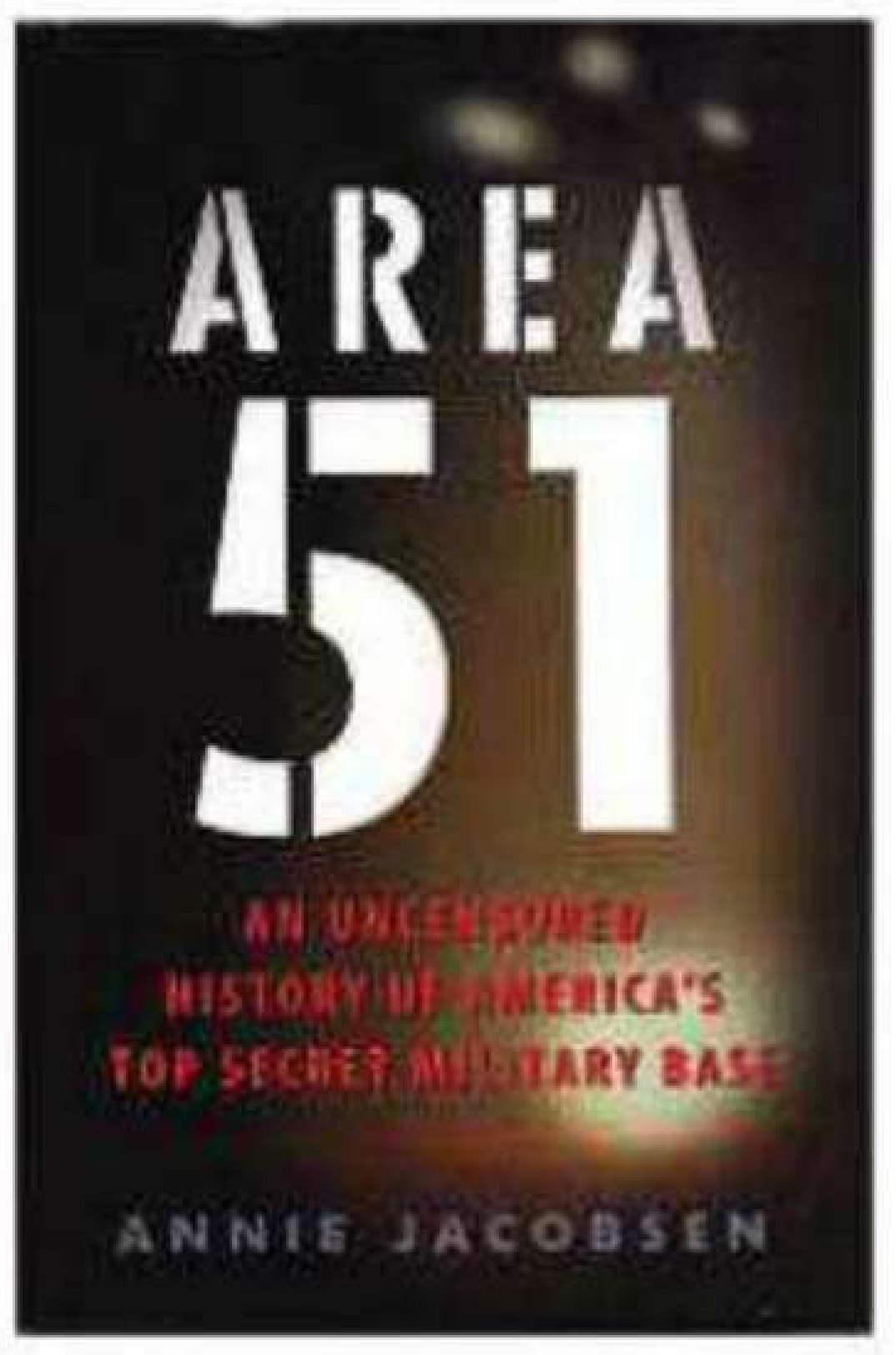
FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

NEW ROSWELL THEORY – WITH ADDED NAZIS!

Looking for a theory that links Nazis, saucers, Cold War panics and general skullduggery? Who isn't? Author Annie Jacobsen, in her new book *Area 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base*, has one to stretch your ufological credulity to the max. This new, improved (but still bonkers) theory suggests that the Roswell saucer and associated alien bodies were in fact the product of the minds of Nazi war criminal Joseph Mengele and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. How? Why? Simple. Stalin decides he wants to shock the US into a *War of the Worlds*-style social panic by staging a saucer crash. His old chum Mengele supplies the 'aliens' (deformed children), and the Horten brothers take time out from exotic plane designing to knock up a saucer in their shed. So far, so sci-fi, but the plot goes horribly wrong when the saucer crashes in the middle of nowhere (Roswell), where it was quickly hushed up. And only now is the story being revealed for the first time – by Jacobsen. Indefatigable researcher Nick Redfern notes that the themes in Jacobsen's tale are similar to stories told to him during the writing of *Body Snatchers in the Desert* (**FT201:30**)... stories about the Horten brothers designing a craft that was responsible for the Roswell legend; stories that the Roswell 'alien' bodies were deformed humans, inbred or suffering from Progeria. Stories, always stories – never proof. In the mixed-up, muddled-up world of ufology, it's easy to listen to any un-evidenced rumour and join the dots to make a new theory, underpinning it by referring darkly to 'government disinformation', as if that makes it any more 'real' than the unlikely possibility that *bona fide* extraterrestrials are involved in *any* UFO case. Read Jacobsen's book and decide for yourself, but don't expect anything other than stories. Nick Redfern blog: http://bit.ly/jk8cCc; *D.Telegraph*, 13 May 2011.



WHEN PROPHECY FAILED

Millions of humans watched the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, but aliens stayed away – despite a prediction they would use the day to reveal their presence on Earth. The source of this story was UFO buff George Filer, a retired air force major who runs US-based website Filer's Files. For years, Filer's site has acted as a credulous conduit for a range of UFO legends and rumours of dubious provenance, but its founder's faith in the imminent arrival of ETs remains undiminished. In March, he told AOL News he expected to see a rise in UFO reports from the area around Westminster Abbey before the 29 April wedding as "[T]he craft seem to have an interest in anything important... they've been sighted recently over Libya and near the Japanese tsunami." Think about that for a minute. Given that hundreds of thousands of people gathered in central London, accompanied by a huge security operation involving aerial surveillance by drones and helicopters, it would have been *more* remarkable if no one had noticed anything odd in the sky. Yet the best evidence produced by the *Sun* was a two-minute video taken by a tourist and posted on YouTube that depicted "a shimmering white object in a cloudless sky near Big Ben". The 'object' appears to change shape as you might expect from something reflective, such as a plastic bag, caught by the wind. Whatever the source, an ET craft spying on the royal nuptials would appear to be the least likely explanation for the 'object' depicted in this unremarkable footage. Nevertheless, speculation linking the Royal Family with flying saucers and crop circles remains popular with UFO proponents. They assume the Royals must, as a result of their access to secrets denied to their subjects, know 'the truth' about the alien presence on Earth. Crop circle aficionado Colin Andrews said he knew the Royals had a great interest in UFOs: "and that includes Prince Charles and the late Princess Di; as for Prince William, I'd be surprised if he wasn't interested as well". We now make a prediction that won't fail: Prince William will receive some very odd letters in his in-tray! (AOL News, 30 March; *Sun*, 28 April 2011; Filer's Files: http://www.nationalufocenter.com/)

Stalin and Mengele seem unlikely conspirators

GEEZA JOB, I CAN DO THAT!

You can just imagine the headlines in the *Daily Mail*: "Government uses your money to pay for man to work in UFO library." Yet that is just what a local authority in more enlightened Sweden is doing, and everyone appears to be happy. "This is the first employee, I think, maybe in the world, working at a UFO archive," Clas Svahn, chair of UFO Sweden, told Radio Sweden. Amazing as it may seem, the new employee will be paid by the Swedish Public Employment Agency to help AFU catalogue their expanding collection of 7,500 books, magazines, files and films. The archive, in Norrkoping, near Stockholm, is now the largest in the world with an unrivalled collection of books and literature donated by enthusiasts from many countries (see **FT221:29**). In the absence of a private or publicly-funded British archive of UFO folklore, the Swedes have come to our rescue and deserve our full support. Recent additions to the archive include an enormous donation from *FT* stalwart Hilary Evans and material from BUFORA and Contact International. Clas Svahn sees this as more than just UFO heaven: "We are keeping things for posterity that other folkloristic archives run by the state don't do." Radio Sweden, 16 May 2011; AFU Archives: http://www.afu.info/).

THERAPY FOR ALIEN ABDUCTEES

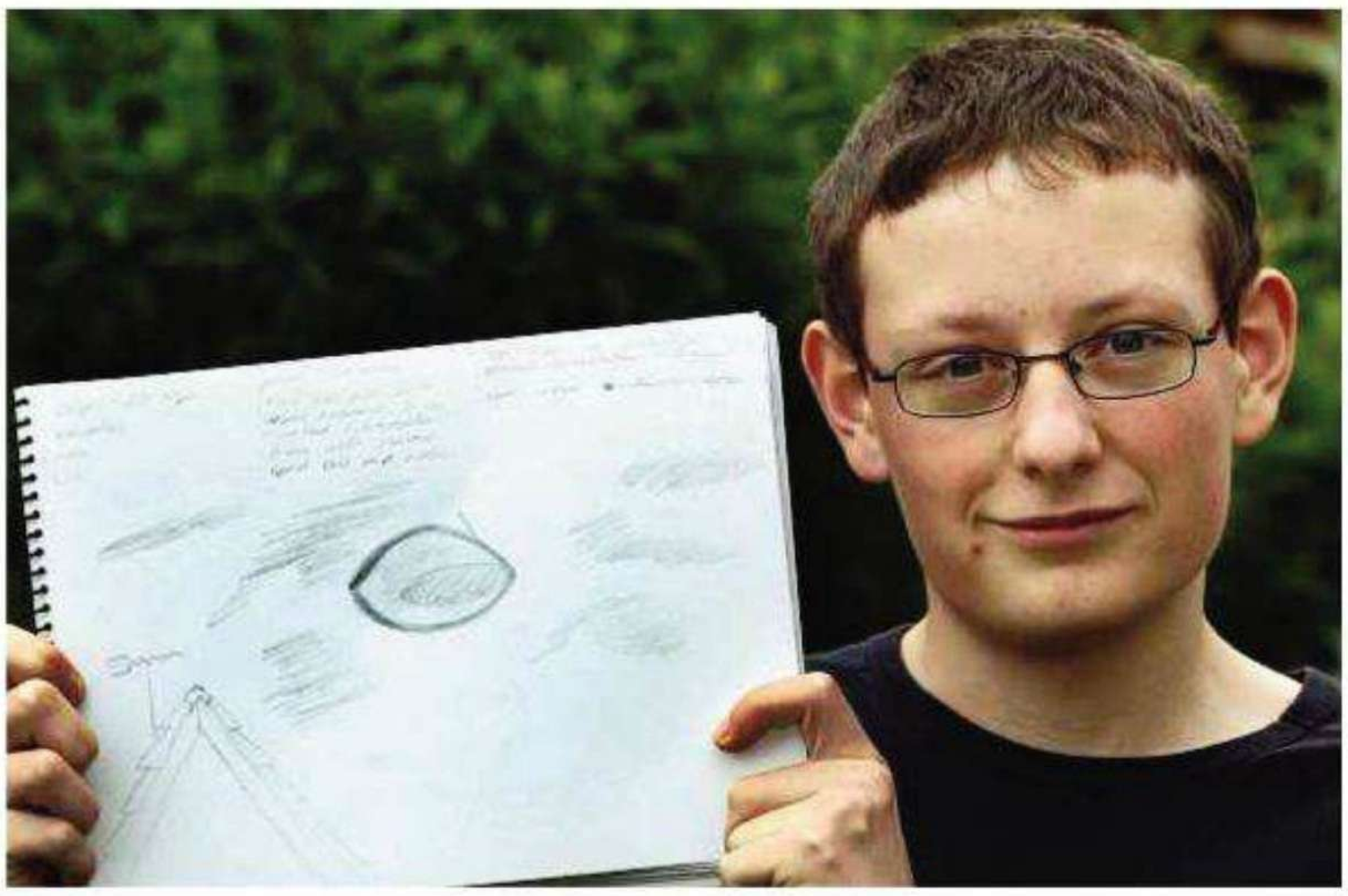
The UFO Society of Ireland is planning to provide a therapy centre for the hundreds of Irish people who believe they have been abducted by aliens. Carl Nally, 50, who succeeded as the society's president on the death of Betty Meyler (obituary **FT271:25**), says he personally knows seven alien abductees. "It's important that people who have been through this know that there's a team of people who understand and sympathise with them," said Mr Nally, from Artane, Dublin. "They need to be told they are not going mad and that what has happened is real [..] None of the abductees I have spoken to had anything negative to say about their experience. In fact, they emerged as more spiritual and relaxed people than before." Mr Nally seems to be a traditional "nuts and bolts" ufologist. He thinks aliens probably resemble those depicted in Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. *Irish Examiner, 19 April 2011*.

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES REPORTS ON MINI-UFOS AND THEIR LINKS WITH SURVEILLENCE TECHNOLOGY.

SPYING SAUCERS

On 4 May 2011, 17-year-old Laurence Baker claimed he saw a UFO from his home in Widnes, Cheshire. What made this story different was that the small oval 'craft' flew very low above the art design student's head and was – he insists – a structured device that he suspected to be 'stealth aircraft technology'. He based his argument on the craft's unusual design: modest in size, but covered in black cell-like structures similar to scales and with an antenna at the rear that projected over the curved surface pointing forward in the direction the object was travelling. This led the UFO – in total silence – towards North Wales at a height below 100ft (30m).



LEFT: Laurence Baker, 17, with a sketch he made of the mystery aircraft he saw.

RUNCORN & WIDNES WEEKLY NEWS / LIVERPOOL SYNDICATION

Laurence feels that it was "out of the question" that this was an alien visitation. Instead, he is sure that what he saw was secret Earthly technology, probably military in origin. While he referred to his sighting as akin to a 'stealth aircraft', its size, hints of remote control and constructed appearance imply something more like the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) used to spy over war zones, taking high definition images of the terrain without putting the lives of any pilots at stake. The witness added that there had been 'unmarked' helicopters in this same part of north Cheshire in the weeks prior to his sighting.

Interestingly, the UK has long been involved with UAV development, which began in earnest in the 1970s and has mostly had military applications. Drones have been used in several war zones from Vietnam onwards and fly today over Iraq and Libya to guide strikes with precision. While their use in civilian activities is more modern, there are commercial craft being designed (by BAE in the UK, for instance); these have been confined to a few specified test areas in recent years.

Going back to the days when these craft were first tested – one might think in a more liberal environment than today's War on Terror – we find decades' worth of UFO sightings that would make more sense if interpreted in the context of UAV technology. It seems appropriate to look at one or two of them to help us assess just how likely it is that something stealthy might have flown over Widnes.

One of the earliest cases that fits this theory occurred on the afternoon of 27 August 1979. A flying instructor was training a military officer from Sandhurst aboard a Cessna 150 from Blackbushe Airfield in Surrey. The pupil was flying the plane when the instructor grabbed the controls and put the aircraft into a steep dive to evade a small, doughnut-shaped object as it crossed their path. This object then travelled around the Cessna as if inspecting them with interest and offered a close view of its appearance before it headed away.

The object had black cell-like structures and an antenna at the rear

The description of this small object is fascinating, as it includes reference to a honeycomb of small cells making up the outer structure, which rotated and even seemed to have something like an antenna emerging; remarkably similar in basic details to the object over Widnes 32 years later.

Another pilot told BUFORA investigator Omar Fowler that he had a more distant view of the mini-UFO the next day and, perhaps importantly, that it was heading for nearby Farnborough, the home of experimental aircraft design and of the famous international aviation trade shows.

In another case reported to me in April 1984, a medical research scientist had seen a hovering object made from a series of 'grid' structures as she drove late at night near the Lakenheath military base in East Anglia. I later discovered via an aircraft engineer in the area that she had probably seen a UAV that had temporarily gone out of control during a military exercise.

On 14 January 2001, a small, remote-controlled craft actually hit the transmitter tower atop Snaefell, the highest mountain on the Isle of Man. Several witnesses saw it happen and there was an investigation afterwards. Telecommunications on the island were even temporarily disrupted. But, despite a search launched from RAF Valley, no aircraft or debris was found. However, ufologist Chris Rolfe was later told by two of the eyewitnesses that police had taken them back to the site for detailed statements and noted that defence sources had concluded that a 'model aircraft' had struck the tower. It is widely believed that this was more or less true, given that a UAV is a super-sophisticated model aircraft.

I have many other cases in my files and their locations cluster around military or BAE complexes such as Warton in Lancashire. My previous article on mini-UFOs (**FT261:29**; **262:29**) also includes a couple of further cases (Stockport, 1975 and Godmanchester, 1988) that include details (small size, cell structure) that look relevant here.

As for the UFO seen over Widnes, there is an interesting addendum. In 2007, a new hovering spy camera was unveiled that was even likened to a flying saucer at the launch. The idea was to test a device that could fly over riots and other such dangerous situations sending instant video to control teams on the ground deploying personnel into the thick of the action.

This device was based on a mini-helicopter with multiple rotors but had a number of features familiar from the object seen over Widnes, including an antenna and a surface area made up of small, black, scale-like tiles. Video footage from German company micodrones GmbH shows small but extremely mobile craft easily mistaken as larger and faster owing to the way they move. You can also see from distant views that the way the multiple rotors spin and the long arm protrudes resolve as features not unlike those of the object spotted over Widnes.

Operational use of one of these craft started in 2009 when it was sold to a UK police force; it was first employed in an arrest some months later. But activity has not been widely discussed after that time as the craft was grounded in February 2010 when the police embarrassingly discovered that new Civil Aviation Authority rules had been put into force. These demanded tighter control of UAV activity and the locations where they operated. It's worth noting that these trials were with the Merseyside police force, which covers an area surrounding the same Mersey estuary on which Widnes sits. The force hoped to resume use of the device once official regulations could be satisfied, but a local furore over civil liberties caused by these craft flying above peoples' heads had also been a complication.

So, is this what was spotted over Widnes? There are doubts, of course, not least because of the reported silence and speed of the craft. But ufologists know how estimates of size, speed or height can be inter-dependent, and that if you misinterpret one, then you misjudge the rest.

Moreover, some trade sources suggest that similar devices have been sold to UK special forces recently for highly covert surveillance activity that, needless to say, is not going to be discussed openly.

Dust to Dust

The interstellar origin of life

Conservative scientists tend to shy away from the idea that extraterrestrial life has anything to do with our own life on Earth and the establishment fences the subject with unreasonable demands for extraordinary levels of evidence, while ignoring data that is already to hand. But alien life is everywhere in the Cosmos, even on the Earth, if we know how to spot it, says **PROFESSOR CHANDRA WICKRAMASINGHE**.

Humans have always sought to discover alien life in natural phenomena that they failed to understand. Belief in the supernatural falls in this category, with a pantheon of gods and goddesses and an evanescent world of spirits to explain the forces of nature to which our primitive ancestors had no option but to submit. When such blind forces of nature eventually came to be understood – and in some instances even tamed – the quest for aliens took other forms.

A readiness to believe in UFOs and alien life pervades the popular culture of the 21st century, despite the tenuous nature of much of the evidence adduced in support. The desire to believe is also encapsulated in the ever-increasing popularity of science fiction fantasising about aliens and alien life on other worlds. In 1938, when the famous radio dramatisation of HG Wells's *War of the Worlds* caused (some) panic in the streets of New York (**FT199:42–47**), it demonstrated mankind's readiness to receive news that there is life there – even intelligent life. Despite this instinct, governmental bodies and scientific institutions of the 21st century behave differently. An attitude of self-righteous conservatism prevails, decreeing that extraterrestrial life is an "extraordinary claim" for which "extraordinary evidence" is demanded. This mantra makes acceptance of even the strongest evidence of primitive life on Mars (see panel on p35) or elsewhere in the Universe seem hard to achieve.

Unlike the prospect of discovering alien intelligence – which might justifiably be viewed with apprehension – the humblest of microbial life-forms occurring extraterrestrially would not constitute a threat. The discovery of alien microbes here on Earth would not impinge on any issues of national sovereignty or defence, nor would it challenge our cherished position as the dominant life form in our corner of the Universe. The arrival of alien microbial life onto our planet, whether dead or alive, should not by any rational argument be perceived as a cause for concern; especially, as appears likely, when some form of extraterrestrial microbial 'invasion' has continued throughout geological time.

The arrival of alien microbial life on our planet, whether dead or alive, is not a cause for concern

Interstellar dust and life

A similar resistance was also encountered when biochemicals were identified within interstellar dust clouds. Already in the mid-1970s, there was clear astronomical evidence for the widespread occurrence in the galaxy of organic (carbon-based) molecules such as formaldehyde. At about this time, infra-red observations of interstellar dust were beginning to show spectral features in the mid- and near-infra-red which could not be easily reconciled with the expected combination of inorganic silicates and water-ice. This evidence was vigorously disputed by our critics for a long time. Fred Hoyle (obit. **FT154:26–27**) and I spent nearly five years of our professional lives modelling this data with biopolymers – polysaccharides, polyaromatic hydrocarbons in particular – and our pioneering work has at last been vindicated by a flood of new data from space telescopes and space probes. The complex organic nature of the dust in interstellar space as well as in comets and meteorites is now beyond dispute.

Precisely how some of these molecules might relate to life and biology is still a matter of controversy. The issue is whether these molecules represent steps *towards*

LEFT: The author (left) pictured with the late Sir Fred Hoyle in 1979.

CHANDRA WICKRAMASINGHE

life – pre-biotic evolution – or whether they are the products of biological degradation – the detritus of life. The overwhelming bulk of the organic material found on Earth is the result of the decay of biology. Why is it not the same for the organics in space?

It has been argued for several decades that the probability of organic molecules transforming into life in the form of even the simplest bacterium is vanishingly small. Odds against this transformation are estimated at 10^x:1 against, with x in the range of several hundreds to thousands. It would be foolish to bet that life appeared more than once or perhaps a few times in the entire history of the Universe. Maintaining that this unique, exceedingly rare and special event happened *against all the odds* on our planet – a minuscule speck in the Cosmos – is pre-Copernican and inadmissible. The model which I favour is one in which the origin of life was a rare event – perhaps even a unique event – but its spread, once it happened, was inevitable.

Despite the posturing of several contemporary 'astrobiologists', who claim that microbes cannot survive interstellar journeys, the weight of evidence does indeed favour survival to the extent that makes viable interstellar transfers of life inevitable.[1] We do not require the survival of more than one in 10^{24} iterant microorganisms, until they become incorporated in a planet- or comet-forming event; there, they would initiate a new cycle of exponential amplification, just a few viable microbes turning into trillions. This exceedingly modest requirement of survival would be impossible to violate, particularly for freeze-dried microorganisms embedded in particles of interstellar dust. However, the vast majority of bacteria in interstellar space *do not and need not* persist in a viable state. Interstellar clouds would thus be filled with the detritus of life as well as a wide range of organic molecules, and these genetic fragments could serve as viruses and viroids.

Panspermia

Facts relating to the widespread distribution of microbial life and its degradation products continue to come from astronomical studies. The Orion Nebula contains giant clouds packed with organic molecules. It is an active site of star-births, the youngest stars being younger than a few million years, and includes many nascent planetary systems (protoplanetary nebulæ). This veritable stellar and planetary nursery is considered by many to be a region where pre-biotic chemistry occurs on a grand scale. I have argued, as an alternative, that it may rather represent a graveyard of life; the polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and other organic molecules present here arising from the destruction and degradation of life.

Identifying the composition of interstellar dust in such stellar clouds has been a high priority for astronomical research since the early 1930s.[2] The dust absorbs and scatters starlight, causing extinction of the light from stars, and re-emits the absorbed radiation in the infrared. An

ETIENNE GILFILLAN / ALEX TOMLINSON

important clue relating to dust composition follows from studies of extinction or dimming of starlight. The total amount of the dust has to be large if nearly all the available carbon and oxygen is condensed into grains. The paradigm in the 1960s – that the dust largely comprised water-ice – was quickly overturned with the advent of infra-red observations showing absorptions consistent with presence of organic polymers. The best overall agreement over the entire spectra of interstellar extinction was a mixture of desiccated bacteria and nanobacteria, including biologically derived aromatic molecules.

Although many astronomers still seek abiotic models to explain this data, biology provides by far the simplest self-consistent model. In particular, we have shown that a claim that the strong peak of interstellar extinction at 2175A can be explained by aromatics (PAHs) *unconnected* with life could be seriously flawed.[3] Aromatic molecules resulting from the decay, degradation or combustion of biomaterial may be similar to soot or anthracite.

The only secure empirical fact relating to the origin of life is encapsulated in a dictum eloquently enunciated by Louis Pasteur – *Omne vivum e vivo* – "all life from antecedent life".[4] If life is always derived from antecedent life in a causal chain that is clearly manifest in present-day life and through the fossil record, the question naturally arises as to when and where this connection might have originated. The continuation of the life-from-life chain to a time before the first life appears on our planet and before the Earth itself formed implies the operation of 'panspermia'.

The concept of panspermia (**FT172:34–35**) has an ancient history going back to the time of classical Greece. It refers in general to the widespread dispersal of the 'seeds of life' in the Cosmos.[5] Critics of panspermia often say that such theories are of limited value because they do not address the fundamental question of origins. Nevertheless, the question of whether life originated *in situ* on Earth or was delivered here from the wider Universe constitutes a scientifically valid line of inquiry that needs to be pursued.

Francis Crick and Leslie Orgel's idea of 'directed panspermia' transfers the problem of origin to another site, possibly invoking intelligent intervention.[6] Fred Hoyle and I have attempted to expand the domain in which cosmic abiogenesis *may* have occurred, focusing in particular on the totality of comets in our galaxy. Like Crick and Orgel, we were influenced by the super-astronomical odds against the transition from organic molecules to even the most primitive living system, as mentioned above.

Primordial soup

The familiar theory of an Earth-bound origin for life was evidently inspired by Charles Darwin. Although Darwin never alluded to the *origin* of life itself in his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*, he had thought about the problem and formulated his own tentative position in a letter to Joseph Hooker in 1871 thus:

"It is often said that all the conditions for the first production of a living organism are now present, which could ever have been present. But if (and oh! what a big if!) we could conceive in some warm little pond, with all sorts of ammonia and phosphoric salts, light, heat, electricity, &c., present, that a proteine [sic] compound was chemically formed ready to undergo still more complex changes, at the present day such matter would be instantly absorbed, which would not have been the case before living creatures were found."

Darwin's prescient remarks provided the basic scientific framework for exploring the problem of abiogenesis throughout the 20th century and beyond. In the late 1920s, AI Oparin and JBS Haldane[7] fleshed out Darwin's thoughts into the familiar 'Primordial Soup theory'. This proposes that the atmosphere of the primitive Earth consisted of a reducing mixture of hydrogen, methane and ammonia and other compounds from which the monomers of life could be readily generated. Primitive 'lightning' and solar ultraviolet provided the energy to dissociate these molecules, the radicals of which recombined through a cascade of chemical reactions to yield biochemical monomers such as amino acids, nucleotide bases and sugars. The classic experiments of Stanley Miller and Harold Urey[8] demonstrated the feasibility of the chemical processes proposed by Oparin and Haldane, and this led to the belief that life could be generated *de novo* as soon as the biochemical monomers were in place. The formation of the first fully functioning, self-replicating life system with the potential for Darwinian evolution is riddled with the difficulty of beating super-astronomical odds, as discussed earlier.

Support for the idea that life originated on Earth in a 'primordial soup' is beginning to wear thin in the light of modern geological and astronomical evidence. It is becoming clear that life arose on Earth almost at the very first moment that it could have survived. During the period from about 4.3 to 3.8 billion years ago (the Hadean Epoch), the Earth suffered an exceptionally high frequency of heavy bombardment by comets and asteroids. Rocks dating to the tail end of this epoch reveal evidence of an excess of the lighter isotope ^{12}C (compared with ^{13}C), pointing to the action of microorganisms that preferentially take up the lighter isotope from the environment.[9]

It is generally thought that much of the water in the oceans came from comets. Along with the water, comets also brought life. This is the theory of cometary panspermia proposed in 1979 by Hoyle and myself. In the formation of a planetary system such as the Solar System and the protoplanetary nebulæ, the first solid objects to form are the comets. These icy objects would contain the molecules of the parent interstellar cloud, and for a few million years after they condensed they would have liquid water interiors due to the heating effect of radioactive decay. If microbial life was already present in the parent interstellar cloud, the newly formed comets serve to amplify it on a very short timescale.

ABOVE: Antennæ galaxies showing clouds of cosmic dust – dust that contains a range of organic molecules.

NASA, ESA & THE HUBBLE HERITAGE (STSCL / AURA) – ESA / HUBBLE COLABORATION

LIFE ON MARS?

The discovery of biological material in meteorites suggests that both Earth and Mars were infected with life from the same external source.

In the first decades of the 20th century, early photographs of Mars were delightfully ambivalent. Speculations about the possibility of intelligent Martian life arose as a result of telescopic observations of enigmatic features on the planet's surface. Some of these features were due to Martian dust clouds and have only recently come to be fully understood. The famous Martian canals – mapped by many astronomers, including Percival Lowell (1855–1916) – proved to be observational artefacts and optical illusions created by the low magnification telescopes available at the time.

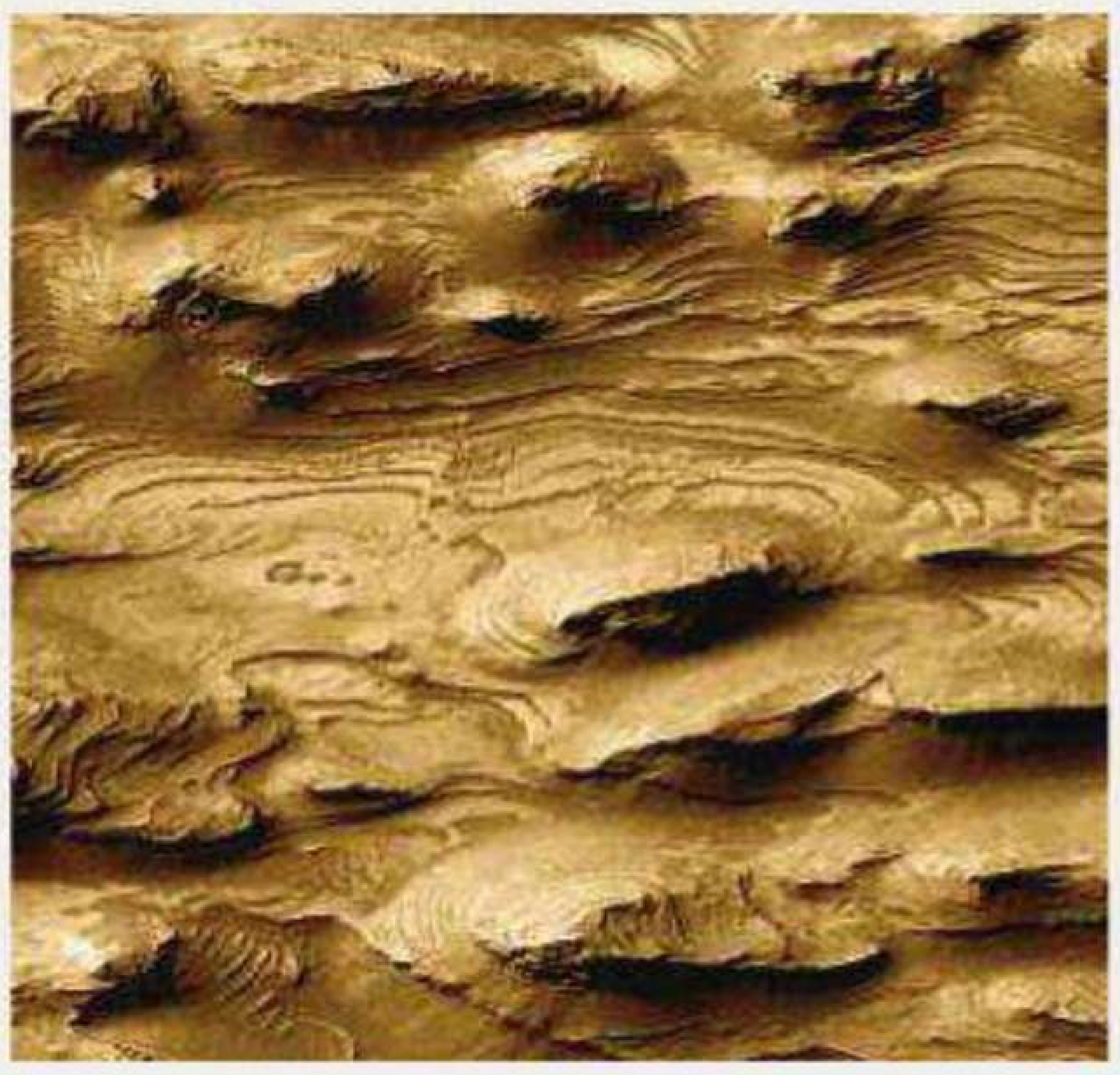
Although evidence for intelligent Martian life was tenuous, it was difficult at that time to disprove the theory. An argument that could not be refuted was that if the Earth were viewed using the same telescopes and technologies from a Martian vantage point, the presence or absence of intelligent life on our own planet would have been just as elusive. There was no way to resolve this question unequivocally until the first Mariner probes of the 1960s sent back close-up images of the Martian surface. The answer was of course disappointingly negative. There were no structures that even vaguely resembled the fabled canals; in fact, no evidence of any Martian life.

Since the Mariner probes, a veritable flotilla of Mars orbiters and landers has been sent to the 'red planet' and they continue to explore its surface and atmosphere in ever-increasing detail. The Viking orbiters of the 1970s led to a revolution in our ideas about the planet's composition and of the possibility of water on or near its surface. Vast river valleys were discovered as well as evidence of flooding in earlier epochs.

In July 1997, the *Mars Pathfinder* found further evidence of running water in the distant past near the mouth of the Ares Valles valley. Since then, *Mars Odyssey*, *Mars Express*, and the rovers *Spirit* and *Opportunity* continue to reveal a varied terrain that may well be suited for some types of primitive extremophilic microorganisms, similar to the primitive forms of life inhabiting the harshest environments on Earth.

In nearly half a century of Mars exploration, the only mission explicitly directed towards searching for microbial life involved two Viking landers carrying dedicated life detection experiments designed by Gilbert V Levin's team for the missions of 1976.[1] The *Viking 1* lander touched down on 20 July 1976 on the *Chryse Planitia*, near the equator; the *Viking 2* lander touched down later that year, on 3 September, on *Utopia Planitia*, closer to the Martian North Pole. They carried out biological experiments *in situ* on samples of soil, one of which was taken from beneath surface rocks.

The presumption was that Martian microorganisms might have metabolic processes similar to those of Earth microbes. The soil was treated with a nutrient containing an isotope in the hope that microbes would take it up and any radioactive gases they gave off would be detected. As with all innovative experiments, the results proved to be more complicated than was expected. The gas that frothed out of the soil when the nutrient was poured on it seemed to be a strong indication of organic life; but against this, even simple organic compounds could not be detected in the Martian soil itself.



LEFT: A photo taken by Mars landers showing sedimentary formations on the planet's surface.

NASA / JPL / MALIN SPACE SCIENCE SYSTEMS

Some structures seen in meteorites were like fossilised nanobacteria

Since one cannot have biology without evidence of that biology, NASA declared that the Viking results were not consistent with life. What was conspicuously missed in this assessment was the possibility that the turnover rate of life under the Martian surface was slow. Indeed, the prototype of the Viking experiment, when taken to the dry valleys of the Antarctic several years earlier, had yielded nearly identical results *in the presence* of Antarctic microbiota.

After a careful reassessment of all the Viking lander data, Gil Levin continues to maintain that Viking discovered unambiguous evidence of microbial life on Mars in 1976. Taken together with more recent studies by instruments on *Mars Express* of the levels of methane in the Martian atmosphere, that claim seems all the more secure. This establishes Levin as the undisputed pioneer of Mars astrobiology.

Two decades after the Viking affair, another result fully consistent with Martian life came from studies of the Mars meteorite ALH84001.[2] This 1.9kg (4lb) meteorite was discovered in the Antarctic in 1984 and is thought to have been blasted from the Martian surface by an asteroid or comet impact some 15 million years ago. A team of investigators led by David McKay discovered sub-micron-sized carbonate globules around which complex organic molecules – including polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) – were deposited. Moreover, strings of ovoid-shaped structures and other forms were found which are strongly suggestive of fossilised nanobacteria.

An initial worry expressed in some circles was that the sizes of the presumed microbial fossils (some 5–10 times smaller than normal terrestrial bacteria) were too small – critics said – to contain the genetic machinery needed for autonomous metabolism. This objection was largely overcome with the discovery (in human urinary tracts) of an autonomously functioning nanobacterium (*Mycoplasma genitalium*).

The topic of microbial fossils in a class of meteorite known as carbonaceous chondrites has sparked bitter controversy in scientific circles ever since it was first suggested in the mid-1960s.[3] Because carbonaceous chondrites are believed to be derived from comets, the discovery of fossilised life forms in comets would provide strong *prima facie* evidence in support of the theory of cometary panspermia. Despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary,[4] claims that all the micro-structures (organised elements) discovered in meteorites were simply artefacts or contaminants led to a general rejection of these identifications.

The situation remained uncertain until, early in 1980, Hans D Pflug found a similar profusion of "organised elements" in ultrathin sections prepared from the Murchison meteorite, a carbonaceous chondrite that landed in Victoria, Australia, on 28 September 1969.[5] Pflug visited the Cardiff Centre for Astrobiology in 1981 and delivered a lecture, introduced by Fred Hoyle, that left the audience speechless. Pflug was not attacked on grounds of 'contamination' or 'artefacts', but he was given what could be described as the "silent treatment". There were muffled whisperings in university common rooms, but nothing in the way of a well-formulated technical criticism ever appeared in print.

More recent work by Richard Hoover[6] and his team at the NASA Marshal Space Flight Center leaves little room for any other interpretation of these structures than that they are microbial fossils. The furore that greeted this publication – with vocal condemnation from science journals and NASA chiefs – shows that earlier tactics of rejection by silence have now been replaced by strident ranting and even personal insults. Had we lived in the Middle Ages, there is no doubt that Richard B Hoover, and possibly Fred Hoyle, Pflug, and I too, would have come to a bad end – probably suffering the fate of Giordano Bruno! (See pp38–43.)

Notes for this panel can be found on p37

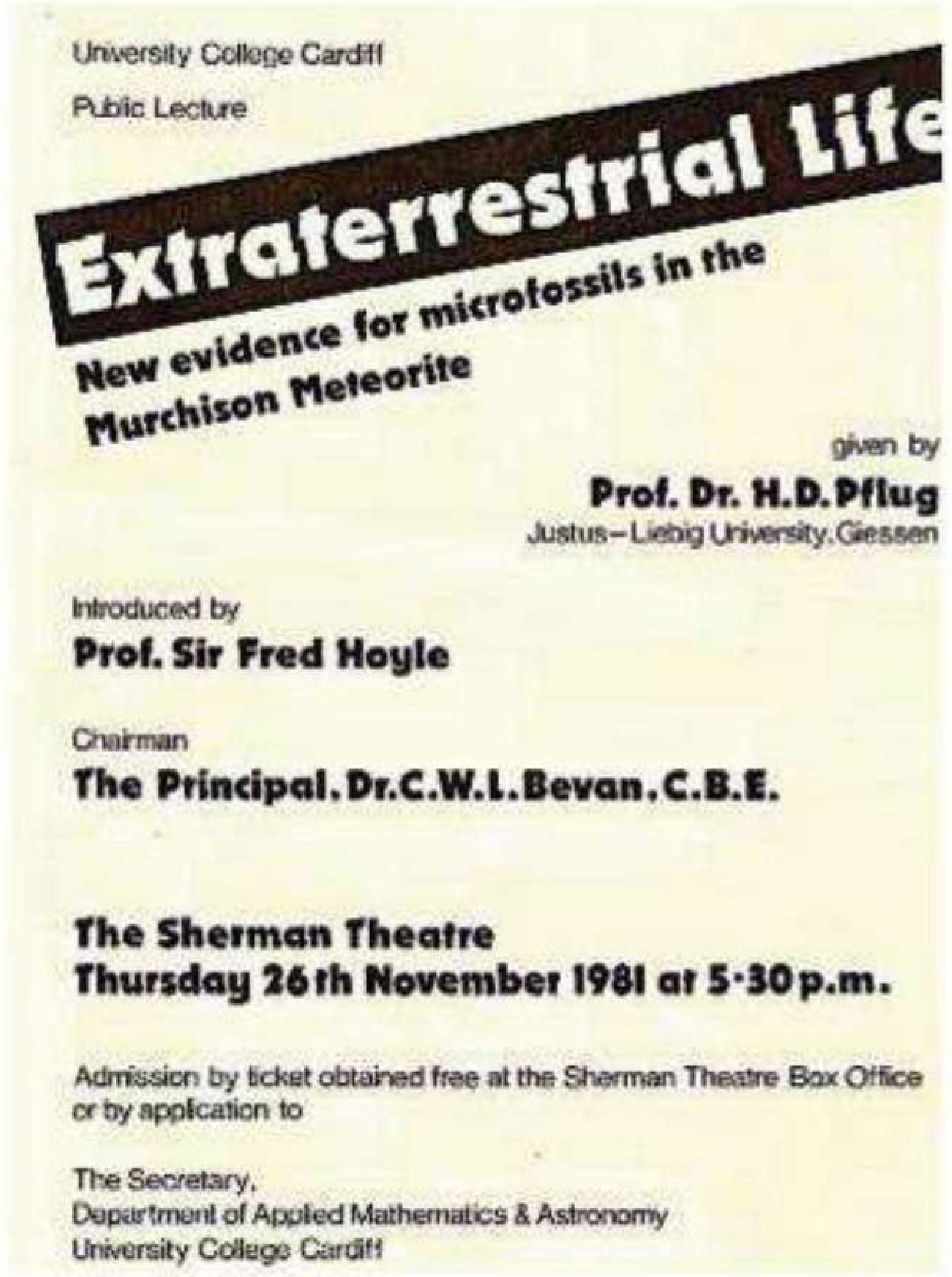
But prior to life being generated anywhere, the primordial comets could provide trillions of "warm little ponds" replete with water, organics and nutrients, their huge numbers diminishing vastly the improbability hurdle for life to originate. Recent studies of comet Tempel 1 have shown evidence of organic molecules, clay particles and liquid water, providing an ideal setting for the operation of the "clay theory" of the origin of life.[10]

It can be argued that a single primordial comet of this kind will be favoured over all the shallow ponds and edges of oceans on Earth by a factor of 10^4, taking into account the total clay surface area for catalytic reactions, as well as the timescale of persistence in each scenario. With 10^{11} comets, the factor favouring life transport on Solar System comets over the totality of terrestrial "warm little ponds" weighs in at a figure of 10^{15}, and with 10^9 Sun-like stars replete with comets in the entire galaxy, we tot up a factor of 10^{24} in favour of a cometary origin for life.

The next step in the argument is that once life is started in some comet somewhere, its spread in the cosmos becomes inevitable. Dormant microorganisms are released in the dust tails of comets and can be propelled by the pressure of starlight to reach interstellar clouds. Transporting life in the form of microorganisms and spores within the frozen interiors of comets carries only a negligible risk of destruction, while transport in either a naked form, within clumps of dust or within meteorites, entails varying degrees of risk of inactivation by cosmic rays and ultraviolet light. It cannot be overemphasised, however, that the successful seeding of life requires only the tiniest survival fraction between successive amplification sites. Of the bacterial particles included in every nascent cometary cloud, only one in 10^{24} needs to remain viable to ensure a positive feedback loop for panspermia. All the indications are that this is indeed a modest requirement that is hard, if not impossible, to violate.

Across the galaxy

While amplification of microorganisms within primordial comets could supply a steady source of primitive life – archæa and bacteria – to interstellar clouds and thence to new planetary systems, the genetic products of evolved life could also be disseminated on a galaxy-wide scale.[11] Our present-day Solar System, which is believed to be surrounded by an extended halo of some 100 billion comets – the Oort Cloud – moves around the centre of the galaxy with a period of 240 million years. Every 40 million years, on average, the comet cloud becomes perturbed due to the close passage of a molecular cloud. Gravitational interaction then leads to hundreds of comets from the Oort Cloud being injected into the inner planetary system, some to collide with the Earth.



University College Cardiff
Public Lecture

Extraterrestrial Life

New evidence for microfossils in the Murchison Meteorite

given by
Prof. Dr. H.D. Pflug
Justus–Liebig University, Giessen

Introduced by
Prof. Sir Fred Hoyle

Chairman
The Principal, Dr. C.W.L. Bevan, C.B.E.

The Sherman Theatre
Thursday 26th November 1981 at 5·30 p.m.

Admission by ticket obtained free at the Sherman Theatre Box Office or by application to

The Secretary,
Department of Applied Mathematics & Astronomy
University College Cardiff

LEFT: The poster for Professor Hans Pflug's controversial 1981 lecture in Cardiff.

Once life is started in some comet somewhere, its spread across the cosmos is inevitable

Such collisions cannot just cause extinctions of species – as one impact surely did 65 million years ago – but they could also result in the splash of surface material back into space. A fraction of the Earth-debris so expelled, surviving shock-heating, could be laden with viable microbial ecologies as well as genes of evolved life. Such life-bearing material could reach newly forming planetary systems in the passing molecular cloud within a few hundred million years of such an ejection event. A new planetary system thus comes to be infected with terrestrial microbes and genes that can contribute, via horizontal gene transfer, to an ongoing process of local biological evolution.

Once life has started and evolved on an alien planet or planets of the new system, the same process can be repeated (via comet collisions), transferring genetic material and carrying local evolutionary 'experience' to other molecular clouds and other nascent planetary systems. If every life-bearing planet transfers genes in this way to more than one other planetary system (say 1.1 on the average) with a characteristic time of 40 million years, then the number of seeded planets after nine billion years (lifetime of the galaxy) is $(1.1)^{9000/40} \sim 2\times10^9$. Such a large number of 'infected' planets illustrates that Darwinian evolution, involving horizontal gene transfers, must operate not only on the Earth or within the confines of the Solar System, but on a truly galactic scale. Life throughout the galaxy, in this picture, would constitute a single connected biosphere.

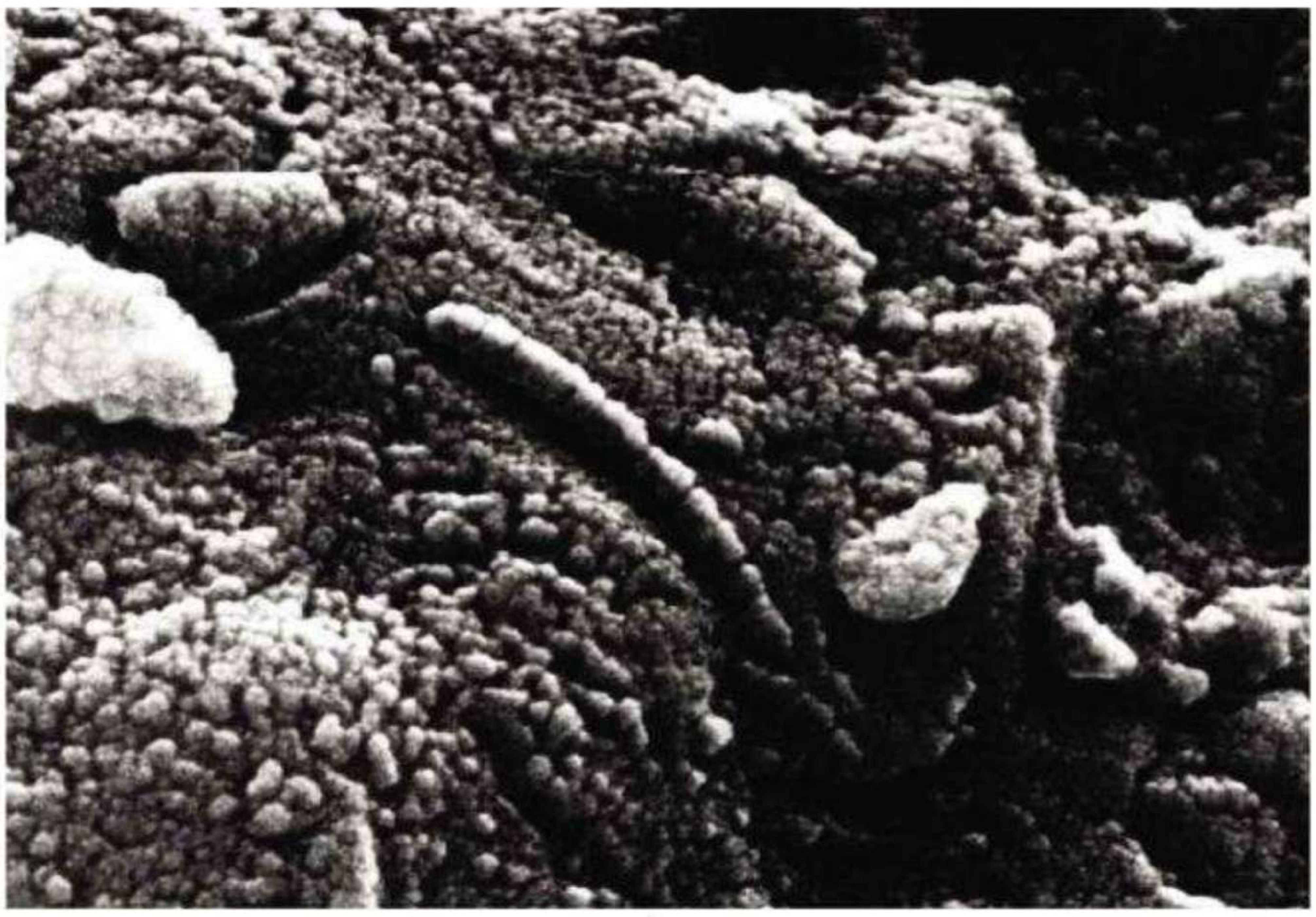
Space-travelling bacteria

The discovery of bacteria and archæa occupying the harshest environments on Earth continues to provide indirect support for panspermia. Viable transfers of microbial life from one cosmic habitat to another requires endurance of high and low temperatures as well as exposure to low fluxes of ionising radiation delivered over astronomical timescales, typically millions of years. The closest terrestrial analogue to this latter situation exists for microorganisms exposed to the natural radioactivity of the Earth, an average flux of about one rad per year. Quite remarkably, microbial survival under such conditions is well documented. Dormant microorganisms in the guts of insects trapped in amber have been revived and cultured after 25–40 million years,[12] and a microbial population recovered from eight-million-year-old ices has shown evidence of surviving DNA.[13] This goes to show that arguments used in the past to 'disprove' panspermia on the grounds of survivability during interstellar transport are likely to be fatally flawed.

While the arrival of rocks from space containing fossil microbes is interesting enough, even more important would be arrivals of viable microorganisms – living bacteria and viruses. From 1986 onwards, infra-red spectra of comets have been consistent with the presence of intact desiccated bacteria. With some 50–100 tonnes of cometary debris entering the Earth's atmosphere on a daily basis, the collection and testing of this material for signs of life should, in principle at least, be straightforward.

Such a project was started in 2001 by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in partnership with this writer. Samples of stratospheric aerosols collected using balloon-borne cryo-samplers were investigated independently in Cardiff, Sheffield and India and have revealed tantalising evidence of microbial life.[14] A particularly interesting component of the collected samples was in the form of 10-micrometre clumps that were identified by standard bacteriological tests as being viable but not culturable (currently dormant or near-dormant, but able to be resuscitated) microorganisms.

Because such large aggregates are virtually impossible to raise to 41km (25 miles), a *prima facie* case for their extraterrestrial cometary origin has been made. In later experiments done by ISRO scientists, three new species of bacteria from 41km were actually cultured, with a strong presumption of their being extraterrestrial in origin. One of these, *Janibacter hoylei*, was named in honour of Fred Hoyle, co-propounder of the theory of cometary panspermia. Hoyle and I have also emphasised the role of bacterial and viral gene



LEFT: Carbon-based nanobacterial-sized structures in the Mars meteorite ALH84001 (shown below).

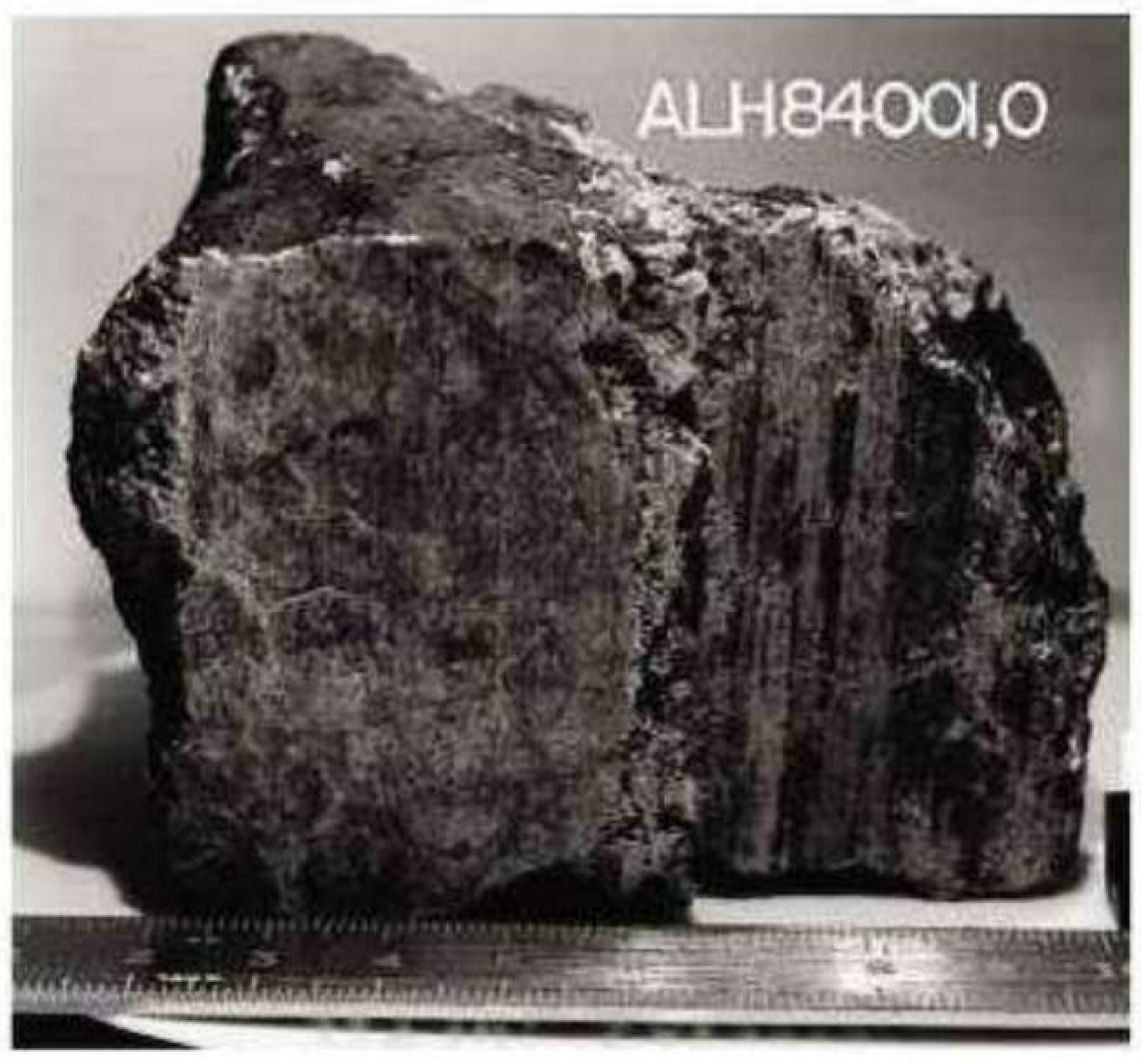
NASA / JOHNSON SPACE CENTER / STANFORD UNIVERSITY

additions to our planet in providing the feedstock (genetic innovations) needed for the evolution of life. Without this input, we have argued, the evolution from bacteria to plants, animals and humans would not have been possible.

Red Rain of Kerala

On 25 July 2001, a sonic boom was heard over a large part of the State of Kerala in southern India and minutes later the clouds unleashed rain that looked like blood (see **FT209:16**; **212:16**). At first, the red colour was thought due to the suspension of red dust of inorganic composition, but this was soon ruled out by microscope studies. Under the microscope, the red particles looked like biological cells, and electron microscope images confirmed that they had all the characteristics of biological cells – thick multilayered cell walls and internal organelles, but so far they have defied identification with any known type of terrestrial bacterium or algal cell.

The controversial theory – that the red cells were unleashed from a disintegrating comet fragment – continues to be debated.



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The rain continued for about 20 minutes and the total mass of red cells involved has been estimated at about 50,000kg (50 tons). These events were repeated intermittently until September 2001. There is also a controversial claim by Prof. Godfrey Louis that the cells do not contain DNA and yet can replicate in nutrients, in high-pressure canisters, even when they are heated to 300°C (570°F). Teams in Cardiff and Sheffield have verified that the cells do reproduce at temperatures of 121°C (250°F), but we have not been able to verify what happens at higher temperatures.[15] Some standard tests for DNA have yielded positive results, but our efforts to extract, amplify and sequence it have not yet met with success. The jury is still out, but the cells show all the signs of being a true alien bug.

Conclusion

The existence of alien bugs, big or small, dead or alive, is violently resisted by the prevailing 21st-century scientific culture. The intensity of emotion surrounding this issue was driven home to me in witnessing the aftermath of the publication of Richard B Hoover's images of life in a meteorite in the *Journal of Cosmology*.[16] In the discussion that ensued, it was clear that the general public welcomed the discovery, but an elite scientific establishment shunned it. The reaction was reminiscent of the rejection by the French Academy of Sciences of the existence of meteorites – stones falling from the skies – in the middle of the 19th century (see **FT143:34–38**; **265:40–44**). All such reports were vehemently and authoritatively denied. The world of science is not yet ready to admit that we are not alone, let alone invaded by alien life.

Author Biography

PROFESSOR CHANDRA WICKRAMASINGHE is a former Fellow of Jesus College Cambridge and Professor of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at Cardiff University. Together with the late Sir Fred Hoyle, he has made some of the most significant contributions to theories of extraterrestrial life in recent times. He has written over 30 books and 350 papers in peer-reviewed journals, over 60 of them in *Nature*.

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The Day the Earth Stood Still

Galileo's battle against the Church over the heliocentric view of the Solar System is usually portrayed as a black-and-white struggle between science and superstition, rationality and religion. But, suggest **LYNN PICKNETT** and **CLIVE PRINCE**, there was a lot more to it than that – including a secret struggle to bring about a New Age based on Hermetic traditions...

Galileo's prosecution by the Church for promoting the heliocentric theory – that the Sun sits at the centre of the Solar System encircled by the Earth and other planets – is usually portrayed as a landmark battle in the war between religion and science, the moment when Galileo becomes science's first great martyr.

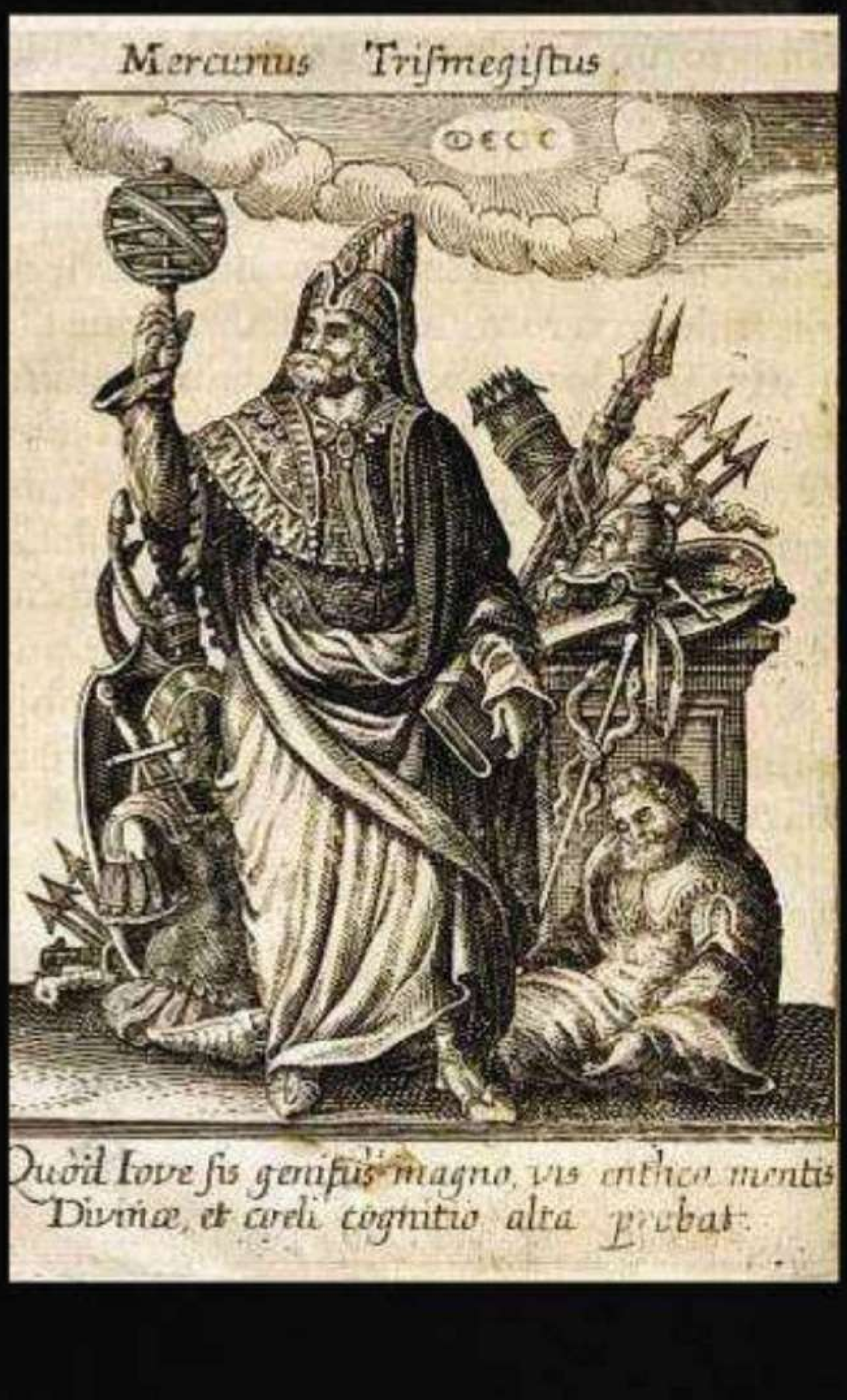
However, when revisiting the story during our research for our book *The Forbidden Universe*, we realised that the traditional explanations of the Church's determination to get Galileo just don't add up. Applying the shameless CGI of hindsight, science historians transmuted him into a modern rationalist-materialist born out of time, persecuted by superstitious – in other words cretinous – men whose intellects, if one could dignify them with the term, were stuck in the Middle Ages.

That's the lazy sod's version of history. The reality, as forteans would suspect, is that there's much, much more to it than that.

In fact, although the 'science-versus-religion' scenario is still often trotted out to a popular audience, academics have long recognised that it is too modern an explanation. They now see the affair rather as a collision between two obstinate egos, two pathologically 'right men': Galileo, who refused to be told what to do or say, and Pope Urban VIII, bitter about Galileo (in his *Dialogue on the Two World Systems*) having put his views in the mouth of a character named Simplicio. But something is still missing – something that *neither* side wanted to be seen in the harsh light of day…

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS: ALAMY / MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

The Hermetica have had more effect on Western civilisation than the Bible


Mercurius Triſmegiſtus
Quod Iove ſis genitus magno, vis enthea mentis
Divinæ, et cæli cognitio alta probat:

THE MISSING PIECE

The answer, we believe, lies in the Hermetic tradition – the heart of the 'occult philosophy', a synthesis of magical, esoteric and philosophical systems – which had a profound effect on shaping Western culture during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, but which is today shamefully marginalised.

But the fact is that the Renaissance is impossible to comprehend without the Hermetic tradition. It's like trying to write a history of the 20th century while ignoring Communism, on the logic that because it failed as an ideology, it could never have been really important.

The treatises collectively known as the Hermetica, on which the tradition is based, have had the greatest effect on Western civilisation of any texts apart from the Bible – and the greatest effect on modern Western civilisation of any texts *including* the Bible. Yet very few people have even heard of them.

The name comes from the legendary Egyptian sage, Hermes Trismegistus ('Thrice-Great Hermes', left), traditionally believed to be the author of these texts. Their exact origins may be controversial, but they undoubtedly date from Egypt in the late centuries BC/early centuries AD, during the period of Greek and Roman domination – and there is a growing body of evidence that the ideas they contain are much, much older.

The Hermetic books were largely lost in Europe in the crackdown on pagan scholarship after Christianity became the Roman Empire's state religion in the fourth century. But they survived in the Middle East, where they paved the way for

mediæval Arab science. Europe rediscovered them in 1463, when an agent working for the great early Renaissance patron Còsimo de' Medici returned to Florence with a set of 14 Hermetic treatises, written in Greek, known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Còsimo even ordered his top scholar, Marsilio Ficino, to drop his epic Latin translation of the complete works of Plato to concentrate on the Hermetic works, which in turn influenced everyone from Leonardo to Shakespeare.

To scholars, philosophers and intellectuals, the Hermetica were a sensation, believed to preserve the wisdom of the most ancient Egyptian civilisation, the pyramid builders, predating even the Old Testament. But the image they presented of humankind could hardly be more different from that set out with pernicious clarity in Genesis. This was the Hermetica's greatest allure.

The Church had always taught that even the brightest men (and women, if they bothered to mention them at all) were miserable, sinful creatures, totally dependent on God's mercy (and the guidance of the Church, of course) for salvation and even their very existence. But in the Hermetica, human beings enjoy unlimited potential, even being capable of becoming gods. The great Hermetic adage is *Magnum miraculum est homo* ("Man is a great miracle"). Even more amazing for the day, the Hermetic tradition also included women in the 'great miracle'. And it was this tsunami of new self-confidence that underpinned the sheer intellectual daring that defines the Renaissance.

Although historians have acknowledged Hermeticism's influence on Renaissance arts, they are being disingenuously selective. For, (as we show in *The Forbidden Universe*), it also powerfully impacted on every hero of the scientific revolution, from Copernicus to Isaac Newton.

BRUNO'S NEW ORDER

It is, however, a major mistake to believe that the Hermetic movement appealed only to a few, albeit often giant, intellects. It also attracted the interest of kings and emperors, even certain popes. Some Catholics thought Hermetic philosophy so venerable it should be incorporated into Christian teaching. Some even argued it should be the other way round: that Christianity should be incorporated into Hermeticism. And if there was any one name associated with firing up the idea of this unlikely pairing, it is that of the Neapolitan Dominican-monk-turned-heretic Giordano Bruno (1548–1600).

Although criminally ignored by the wider world, he is a favourite with us, and with other forteans, and received the well-deserved attention of Hunt Emerson and Kevin Jackson in their cracking four-part 'Phenomenomix' about his exploits (**FT269–272**). Now, Bruno is even starring in SJ Parris's bestselling thrillers, *Heresy* and *Prophecy*.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / GABRIEL BOUYS

LEFT: Statue of Giordano Bruno in Campo de Fiori, Rome, where he was burnt at the stake.

The Hermetic books claimed the world's true religion would be restored

Bruno was an extraordinary man, coming up with scientific concepts way ahead of their time – such as an infinite universe and other inhabited worlds – which he largely derived from the Hermetic principles. But they also underpinned his campaign for a root-and-branch reform of society – which included religion and politics.

Bruno believed that Hermeticism represented the true religion, the wisdom of ancient Egypt that had been corrupted, first by the Jews and then the Christians. But the Hermetic books themselves prophesied that the world's 'true religion' would be restored one day, and Bruno believed this applied to his own time. This would, he firmly believed, entail at least a radical reform of the Catholic Church – if not its total replacement.

It's at this point that we find ourselves shouting "they're behind you!" at Bruno. Surely there was only one way his Hermetic zeal could end? Although his fate was only too predictable, Bruno had reason to believe he could escape the homicidal arsonists known as the Inquisition. After all, he was famous, enjoying the patronage or protection of the likes of Elizabeth I, Henri III of France and even the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II. Under the circumstances, he might be forgiven for imagining himself to be safe(ish).

But Bruno wasn't just a wandering philosopher with a good line in buttering up monarchs and emperors. He was also a political firebrand (bad taste pun intended).

During his European travels in the 1580s and early 1590s, he established a secret society, the Giordanisti – he was good at shameless self-promotion – to continue his work and campaign for religious reform. Rumours concerning this must have a similar effect to poking the Pope with a cattle prod. There was now no way the Vatican could ignore Giordano Bruno.

Bruno's belief in the imminence of the Hermetic age also centred on a special interpretation of heliocentricity, the theory proposed by the Polish canon Nicolaus Copernicus five years before Bruno's birth and still ragingly controversial.

Copernicus had theorised that the Earth circles the Sun in *On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres* in 1543 – but what was his inspiration? A clue can be found on the very page where his famous diagram sets out his radical new vision of the Solar System. Four lines below, while discussing the spiritual significance of the central Sun, he explicitly references a passage in the Hermetica in which Hermes Trismegistus describes the Sun as a "visible god".

In fact *all* Copernicus's radical notions are spelt out in the Hermetic books. For example, one treatise talks explicitly about the "rotation" of the world. Even more tellingly, another states that "the Sun is situated at the centre of the Cosmos, wearing it like a crown" and "Around the Sun are the six spheres that depend from it: the sphere of the fixed stars, the six of the planets, and the one that surrounds the Earth". ('Spheres' corresponds to 'orbits').

By explicitly referencing the Hermetic

works on the very page where he presents his new cosmic order, Copernicus was tacitly announcing he had found mathematical and physical proof for the books' own ancient principles.

Another academic myth is that Copernicus's ideas so infuriated the Church that he delayed publication until he was on his deathbed to avoid its wrath. But the Vatican had no theological issues with it at all – the Pope's secretary even encouraged Copernicus to go public. But by the time of the ecclesiastical action against Galileo some 70 years later, something had changed…

Basically, it was all down to Giordano Bruno, who – based on the famous Hermetic principle of "as above, so below/as below, so above" – not only believed that changes in the heavens cause or reflect changes on Earth, but also that a change in humanity's *perception* of the heavenly order would precipitate change. He argued that if heliocentricity could be established beyond doubt then that would literally trigger the new age of Hermetic enlightenment, restoring the religion of ancient Egypt and overturning Christianity. No pressure on Galileo, then.

THE HERMETIC REVOLUTION

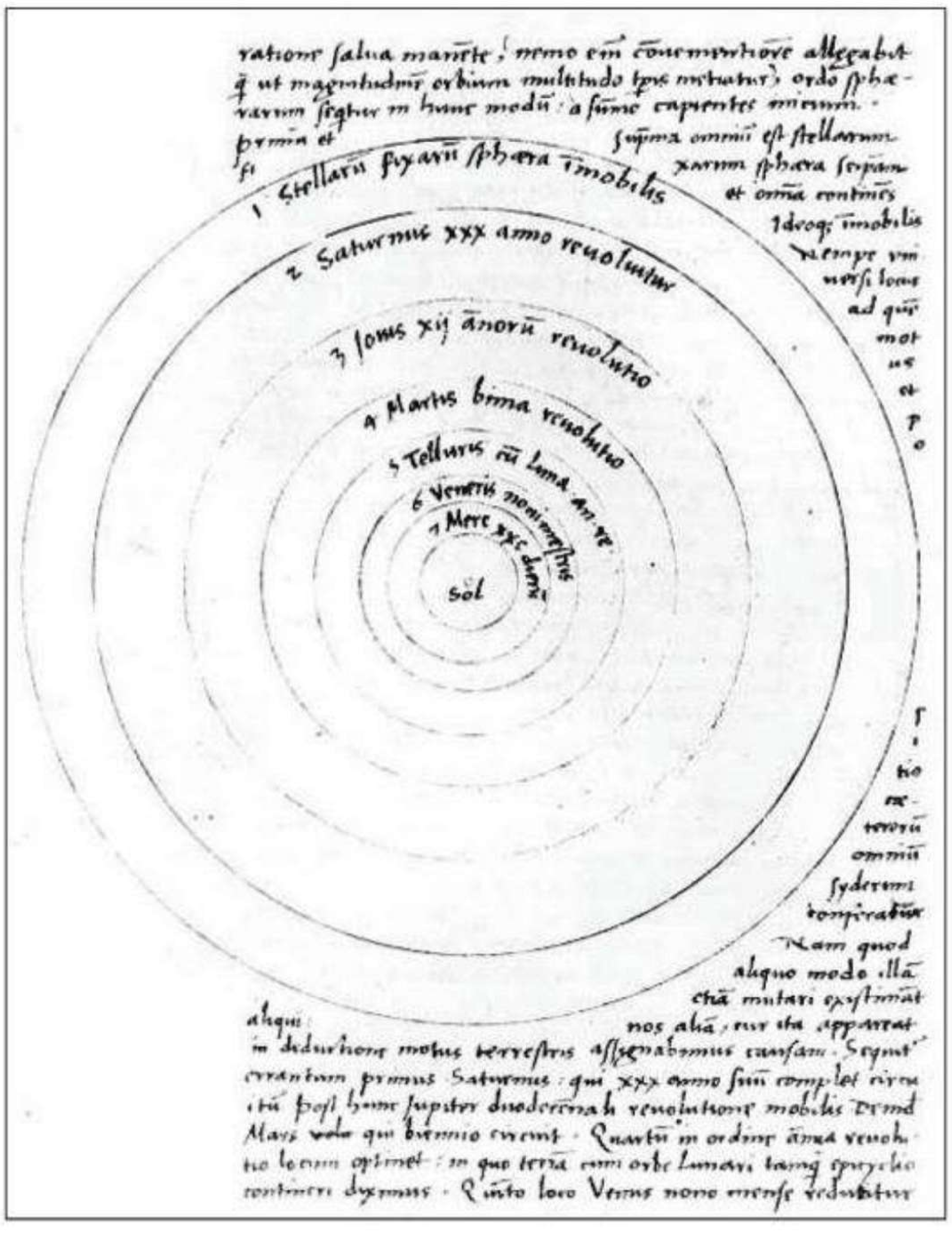
As for Bruno himself, in 1592 he blithely took himself off to Venice – as things turned out, a somewhat unwise move. The republic was a hotbed of opposition to papal authority and there were even moves to forge a political and religious alliance with England. The key figures in this plan were all associated with Bruno, including Traiano Boccalini, author of *News From Parnassus* which, explicitly modelled on one of Bruno's own works, called for a "general reformation of the whole wide world".[1] Bruno also visited an old contact in Padua, in the Republic of Venice, Gian Vincenzo Pinelli, the distinguished scholar at the centre of a Europe-wide network of intellectuals and radical thinkers. He is best remembered today as Galileo's mentor.

However, Bruno was betrayed to the Inquisition and packed off to Rome, where he languished in prison for eight years, before being burned at the stake in February 1600. His final trial and execution were presided over by the Cardinal Inquisitor Roberto Bellarmino, later a key player in the drama surrounding Galileo.

Bruno's exit left a space on centre stage, a major opportunity for one aspiring scholar. Bruno had applied for the chair of mathematics at Padua University, but owing to his untimely arrest the job went to another candidate – one Galileo Galilei.[2] Of more immediate significance, however, was the arrival, just a few months after Bruno's departure, of his Hermetic heir.

The striking similarities between the careers, philosophy and aims of Bruno and Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) suggest a shared plan. Indeed, 23-year-old Campanella's arrival on the scene so soon after Bruno's arrest suggests he was picking up where the Neapolitan had been forced to leave off.

Like Bruno, Campanella was a Neapolitan and a Dominican who became a crusading Hermeticist. Arriving in Padua shortly after Bruno's departure, Campanella met Pinelli and Galileo. It was also in Padua that in early 1594 he was arrested by the Inquisition and transferred to Rome – to the same prison as Bruno. Compared to Bruno, Campanella got off lightly: after his works had been abjured, he was released into a Dominican monastery and subsequently ordered back to Naples.


1 Stellarũ fixarũ sphæra immobilis
2 Saturnus xxx anno revolutur
3 Jovis xij anorũ revolutio
4 Martis bima revolutio
5 Telluris cũ Luna an re
6 Veneris nonimestris
7 Merc xxx dierũ
Sol

ABOVE: The heliocentric view of the Solar System, as envisaged by Nicolaus Copernicus.

Campanella shared Bruno's vision of heliocentricity as the trigger for the new age – his major work, was *La città del Sole* (*City of the Sun*, written in the years before 1602; published 1623) in which he set out his vision of an ideal society ordered on Hermetic principles – which he believed would begin in 1600. The approach of the new century encouraged him to be much more politically proactive than Bruno. He then threw himself into organising the Calabrian revolt, aiming to chuck the Spanish rulers out of the Kingdom of Naples to pave the way for the establishment of a republic based on magical principles, one that would hold aloft the torch of the new age for the rest of the world to follow.

Informants betrayed the uprising to the Spanish, and after the organisation was ruthlessly crushed in November 1599, Campanella and the other leaders were arrested. This almost certainly accounts for the Inquisition's sudden desire to be rid of Bruno, who had also railed against Spanish rule and was the revolt's spiritual inspiration; he went to the stake barely three months later. Stephen Mason of Cambridge University argues that he was executed as an example to the Calabrian rebels, because of the connection to Campanella.[3] Publicly executing the insurgents' spiritual leader at the beginning of their special year of 1600 was undoubtedly a calculated move.

Campanella escaped the death penalty by feigning madness, and was instead sentenced to life imprisonment. But not only was he supplied with books and writing materials, he also received scholarly visitors, who ensured his writings were published in Germany. Presumably bribes were involved from somebody, somewhere.

Seen in the light of the Hermeticists' political machinations – especially the threat of the shadowy Giordanisti – Copernicus's original evocation of the name Hermes Trismegistus in *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* was hardly likely to have been missed by the guardians of the Church.

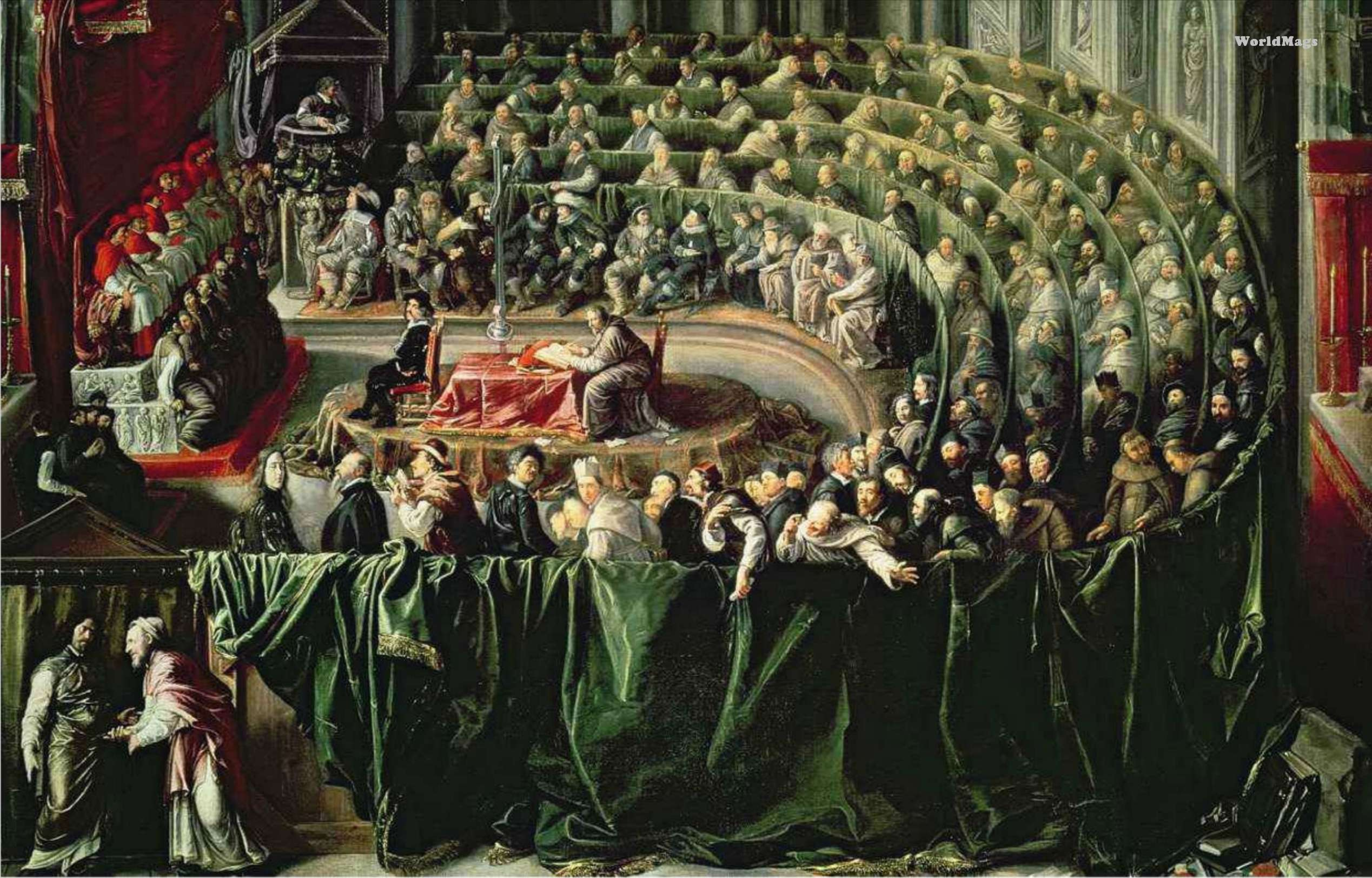
The defenders of the Church – the Inquisition and the Jesuits – had every reason to be nervous. During the 16th century, the Roman Church had experienced its greatest trauma, the rise of Protestantism. Who was to say what might happen next? Perhaps the Inquisition and Jesuits were over-reacting, but the times engendered paranoia.

As long as Copernicus's idea remained simply a theory, however, the Hermetic implications could be contained. But when an individual claimed he had come up with *proof*, then the Church became seriously worried. And ecclesiastical anxiety ran even deeper with a threat from a direct associate of the mystical revolutionary Tommaso Campanella and other Giordanisti suspects – in other words, Galileo.

THE STARRY MESSENGER

Galileo di Vincenzo Bonaiuti de' Galilei's career began in 1592 at the age of 28 when – thanks to Bruno's incarceration – he became professor of mathematics at the University of Padua. Here, as we have

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE



ABOVE: The Trial of Galileo – unknown 17th-century artist, Italian School.

BRIDGEMAN / PRIVATE COLLECTION

seen, he met Campanella, the beginning of a lifelong association. Another major influence was his mentor Pinelli, who introduced him to the emergent science of optics, which was to make Galileo's reputation. Other heretical associates included Traiano Boccalini, author of the Bruno-inspired *News from Parnassus*. With friends like these, Galileo would surely have been on the Inquisition's watch list from the beginning.

Galileo was also familiar with Bruno's writings. Indeed, after the publication of Galileo's first book touching on the controversy, the German astronomer and mathematician Johannes Kepler criticised Galileo for not honestly acknowledging the intellectual debt he owed to Bruno.

It was around 1610, with the new technology of the telescope, that he made observations – the Moon's rugged surface reminiscent of our own world, the moons of Jupiter and particularly Venus's lunar-like phases – that strongly supported Copernicus. Galileo realised their sensational potential, rushing into print with his first wave of discoveries in *The Starry Messenger* (*Sidereus nuncius*) in 1610. The intelligentsia were indeed excited: he duly became court mathematician and philosopher to Còsimo II de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany.

However, Galileo did not use his discoveries to bolster the Copernican theory, even though he was an ardent supporter, writing to Kepler as early as 1597 that he had "become convinced by Copernicus many years ago". In *The Starry Messenger*, and a follow-up book on his discovery of the phases of Venus, he merely presented the observations. Perhaps he thought it best to play down their Copernican implications.

Galileo's fame changed into notoriety overnight

Of course, Bruno's fate would have been etched in Galileo's mind as a cautionary tale. But there is no doubt whatsoever that he was fully aware of the significance the Hermeticists read into heliocentricity.

One of his staunchest supporters during the controversy, Campanella composed the *Defence of Galileo* (*Apologia pro Galileo*) from his prison cell in 1622. And – by then a free man living in Rome under the protection of the Pope himself – Campanella was still corresponding with Galileo 10 years later, during his most difficult period, urging him to stand firm because of the *spiritual importance* of his work. As the British historian Frances Yates notes: "Both in the apology and in letters to Galileo, Campanella speaks of heliocentricity as a return to ancient truth and as portending a new age, using language strongly reminiscent of Bruno in the *Cena de le ceneri* [*The Ash Wednesday Supper*, in which he advocated Copernicus and declared that establishing heliocentricity would free the human spirit]… And in other letters he assures Galileo that he is constructing a new theology which will vindicate him." [4]

Matters came to a head in 1615 when Galileo finally went public, writing: "I hold that the Sun is located at the centre of the revolution of the heavenly orbs and does not change place, and that the Earth rotates on itself and moves around it." His fame changed into notoriety overnight.

GALILEO, CAMPANELLA AND THE POPE

When, as a result, Paul V ordered an investigation into heliocentricity on theological grounds, and it was declared contrary to scripture, Copernicus's *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* was finally banned, along with all other pro-heliocentric works. Galileo was summoned to Rome to be warned off and put right. The Sun moved round the Earth and not vice versa. It was true because the Vatican said so.

But there was an unspoken subtext: the cardinal given the task of warning Galileo was Roberto Bellarmino, the same man who had interrogated Bruno and was responsible for his condemnation and execution. This was not a coincidence; Bellarmino had been Archbishop of Capua since 1602, but was recalled to Rome specifically to deal with Galileo.

Bellarmino, of course, understood from

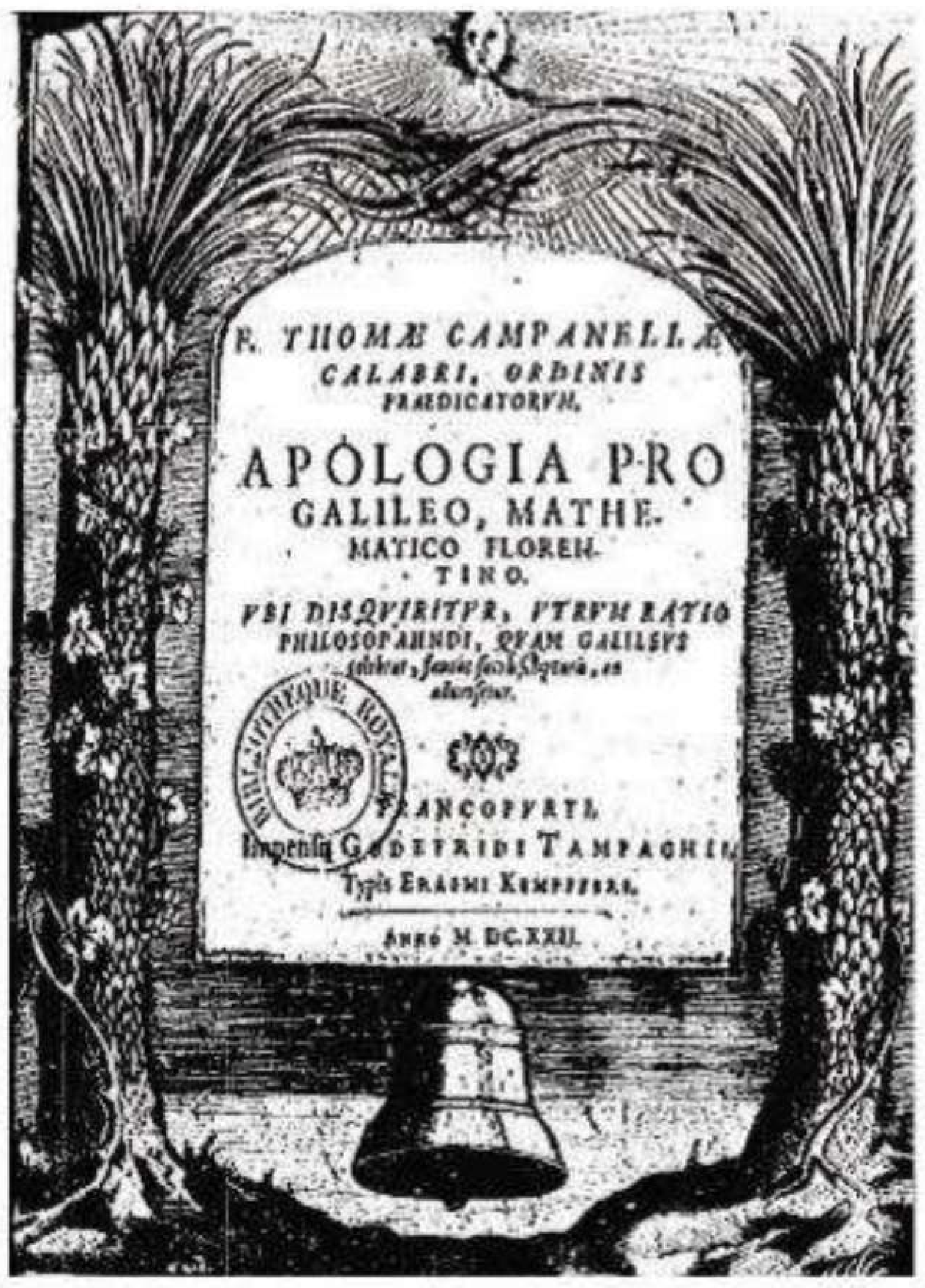
his experience of Bruno the significance that heliocentricity possessed for the Hermetic revolution. Bruno was dead and Campanella incarcerated in Naples, but they had followers – nobody knew how many. And now here was Galileo, associated with the likes of Campanella, edging ever closer to the proof that Bruno declared would trigger the new Hermetic age. Galileo was handed a statement written by Bellarmino stating that the Pope had decreed that Copernicus's views could not be "defended or upheld". Galileo hastily agreed.

Even more telling is Galileo's immediate reaction: he sought permission from his patron, Duke Còsimo, to travel to Naples – but was refused. Why Naples? A crucial piece of the jigsaw fell into place when we read in a paper by Olaf Pedersen, a specialist in the religious aspects of the Galileo affair, that the reason for Galileo's request and the otherwise odd refusal was that he wanted to visit Tommaso Campanella in his prison cell.[5] The Church brings in the man who had condemned Bruno to warn Galileo off, and Galileo's first reaction is to try to consult Bruno's successor Campanella…

Although Galileo was denied his meeting, Campanella penned the *Defence of Galileo* (above,) which his followers published in Frankfurt. However, given Campanella's reputation – convicted for heresy and subversion – it would hardly enhance Galileo's reputation. Which is probably why, back in Florence, Galileo kept his head down. Nothing in the Pope's decree prevented the *discussion* of heliocentricity as a hypothesis, and many scholars were avidly doing just that. Galileo himself dropped the whole subject for many years, although he was clearly waiting for an appropriate time to re-emerge as its iconic figurehead.

Then in 1623 an old friend, Maffeo Barberini, became Pope Urban VIII. Taking this as a sign that his luck had changed, Galileo went to visit him in Rome shortly afterwards. Urban's election was also good news for Campanella (below). In 1626, Urban requested that the Spanish king release him from prison to perform protective magic for him. After 27 years, Campanella was not only free but also adviser to the Pope! Urban even granted him permission to found a college in Rome to train missionaries who espoused his religious and philosophical ideas. Such papal favour being bestowed on his greatest and most controversial supporter was another good sign for Galileo.

Galileo decided it was safe to write *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, a discussion of the new Copernican and the old Ptolemaic systems. With the formal approval of the Inquisition, it was published in Florence in 1632. The Pope merely asked Galileo that his own anti-heliocentric views be included.

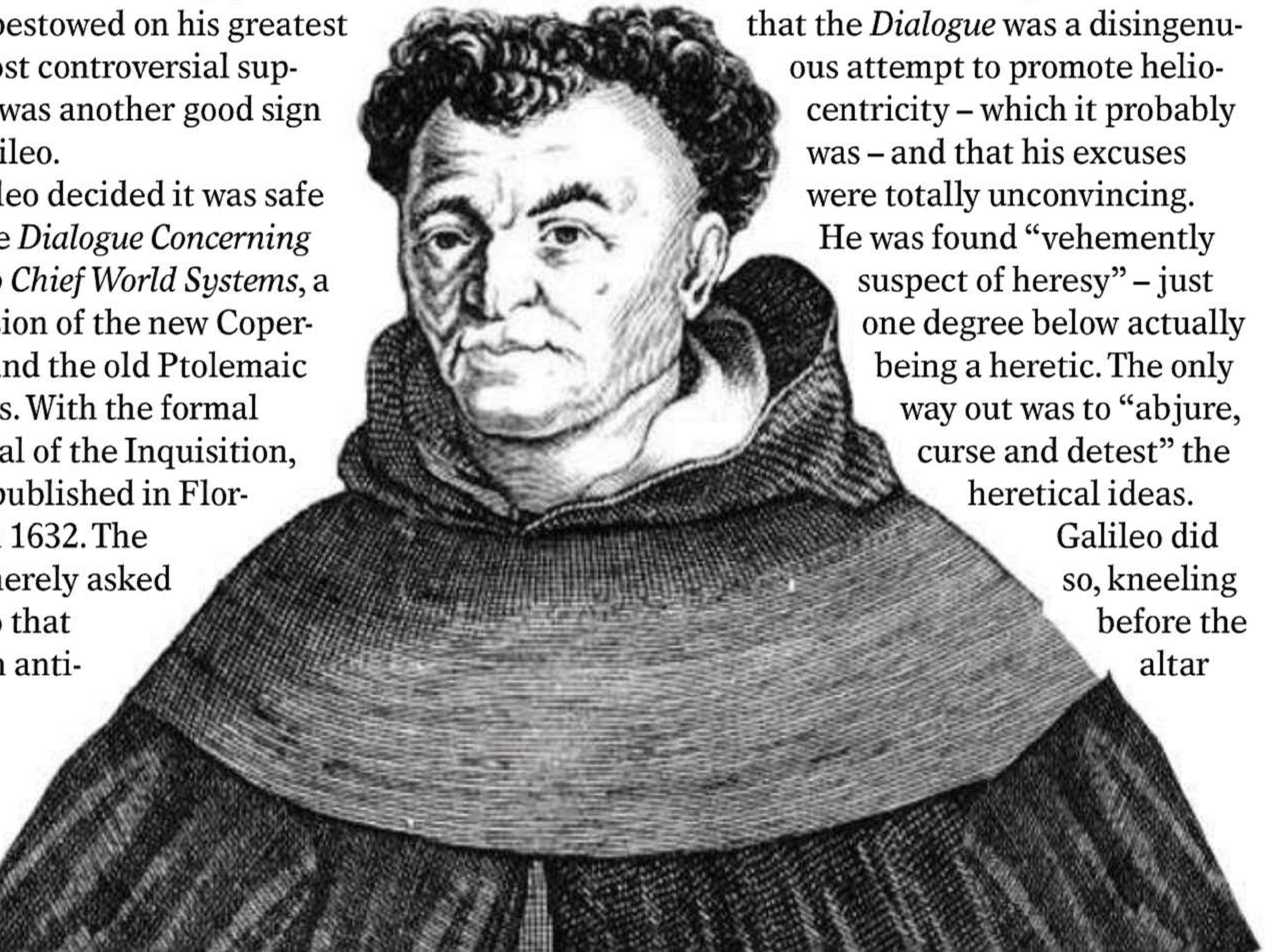

F. THOMÆ CAMPANELLÆ
CALABRI, ORDINIS
PRÆDICATORVM,
APOLOGIA PRO
GALILEO, MATHEMATICO FLORENTINO.
VBI DISQVIRITVR, VTRVM RATIO
PHILOSOPHANDI, QVAM GALILEVS
FRANCOFVRTI,
Impensis GODEFRIDI TAMPACHII,
Typis ERASMI KEMPFFERI,
ANNO M. DC. XXII.

Significantly, however, there are close parallels between Galileo's *Dialogue* and Bruno's 1584 work *The Ash Wednesday Supper*. It might not be a coincidence that this was Campanella's favourite of Bruno's works.

Despite the myth of the 'clash of egos', it's clear that Urban had to be prodded into action. His many opponents among the Cardinal Inquisitors were making much of his endorsement of the *Dialogue*'s publication as another sign of his rumoured softness on heresy. There *was* no clash of egos. Urban was just running scared.

A reluctant Urban instructed the Inquisition to summon a shocked Galileo to Rome, where he appeared before the Inquisition in April 1633. He declared his book had merely discussed Copernican theory, and that until the decree of 1616 he had regarded neither the Copernican nor Ptolemaic hypothesis as beyond dispute (contradicting his statements to Kepler 36 years before), but since then he had held the Ptolemaic view "to be true and indisputable". While few would blame Galileo for trying to weasel out – after all, this was the Vatican Gestapo – they are hardly the words of a noble defender of intellectual freedom or willing would-be martyr. And yet neither does he seem an arrogant old man who refused to admit he was wrong.

Galileo lost. The inquisitors ruled that the *Dialogue* was a disingenuous attempt to promote heliocentricity – which it probably was – and that his excuses were totally unconvincing. He was found "vehemently suspect of heresy" – just one degree below actually being a heretic. The only way out was to "abjure, curse and detest" the heretical ideas. Galileo did so, kneeling before the altar of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, from where Bruno had been taken to his horrendous death 33 years earlier. Publication of anything by Galileo was forbidden and he was sentenced to life imprisonment, but as he was over 70 this was commuted to house arrest. One of his first visitors was – Tomasso Campanella.



RETROSPECTIVE

Although Galileo's trial is always cited as *the* moment when forces of reason and dogma collided head-on, the Hermetic factor is, we argue, more important. The reverence heliocentricity was accorded by Hermeticists was the major reason the Church sought to damn the theory, and therefore Galileo himself. The Hermetic factor was there, but in the background, which is why there is a distinct sense of something missing from the conventional story of the trial.

However, Galileo was by no means as innocent as he appeared. There are valid questions about his relationship to the underground Hermetic reform movement. There is his continued association and correspondence with Campanella, especially his wish to see him in the wake of his 'yellow card' in 1616. Campanella was hardly the kind of company he should have wanted to keep.

And there is Galileo's apparent use of Bruno's *Ash Wednesday Supper* – the first mention of the Copernican Sun as trigger for a new Hermetic age – as a model for his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. Was this to show the Giordanisti he was a sympathiser? Was the great Galileo even an active member of Bruno's revolutionary organisation? FT

***The Forbidden Universe* by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince is published by Constable & Robinson, priced £18.99.**

NOTES

1 This is the description of Boccalini's work given in the first of the famed Rosicrucian manifestos of 1614, which included an extract from *News from Parnassus*, one of several examples of the close connection between the Italian Hermetic reform movement and the German circles from which Rosicrucianism emerged.

2 Timothy Ferris: *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*, The Bodley Head, 1989, pp85–86.

3 Stephen Mason: "Religious Reformation and the Pulmonary Transit of the Blood", *History of Science*, vol. 41, part 4, no. 134, Dec 2003, p468.

4 Frances Yates: *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, p383.

5 Olaf Pedersen: "Galileo's Religion", in CV Coyne (ed.): *The Galileo Affair: A Meeting of Science and Faith – Proceedings of the Cracow Conference, May 24–27, 1984*, Specola Vaticana, Vatican City, 1985, p97.

Author Biography

Since meeting accidentally in 1989, **LYNN PICKNETT** and **CLIVE PRINCE** have worked together on several best-selling books, including *The Stargate Conspiracy, The Templar Revelation, Turin Shroud: In Whose Image?* and *The Masks of Christ.*

Weaving the World's End

While the world's media descended on Westminster Abbey for the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in April, few of the millions watching would have known about an enigmatic artwork at the heart of this holy building that reveals the date of Doomsday. **RUTH CLYDESDALE** uncovers the story of Westminster Abbey's Cosmati pavement.

Visitors to London tend to head for Westminster Abbey for two reasons: it's the abbey of coronations and royal weddings, and it's stuffed full of royal tombs. But this venerable building is also a gigantic cabinet of curiosities. Here, you can run your hand over Britain's oldest door, stand beneath the most spectacular fan-vaulted ceiling in existence or ogle Elizabeth I's corset. Amongst these, and a plethora of other delights, lies the Abbey's most precious jewel: the Cosmati pavement before the high altar.

Concealed from view for over a century, this extraordinary carpet of marble, semi-precious stone and glass has recently been cleaned and restored. Visitors can now gaze at what remains of the mediæval pavement, created by master craftsmen from Italy and embellished with three mysterious inscriptions – one of which gives the date of the world's end. This is the finest Cosmati work north of the Alps, and it is unique in being inscribed. What's more, it displays its message through sacred geometry in the holiest area of the Abbey, the sanctuary. This, not coincidentally, is where each new monarch is crowned.

The Cosmati pavement is the most spectacular element in a nexus of items that together make up the holy heart of the Abbey. For behind the high altar lies a small area, virtually hidden, containing the shrine of St Edward the Confessor and the tomb of its maker, Henry III. The floor of this feretory, its shrine and Henry's tomb are also decorated in Cosmati work, although pious pilgrims have prised most of it off over the centuries. These elements – the shrine, the tomb and the pavement – together tell a tale in which spiritual and temporal power are closely woven and placed in a cosmic context.[1]

> **This venerable building is also a gigantic cabinet of curiosities**

THE HOLY KING

When King Edward the Confessor (born 1003, reigned 1042–1066)[2] re-founded a Benedictine monastery on Thorn Ey (Thorn Island), a couple of miles west of London, he can hardly have expected to end up canonised and enshrined in his own abbey. Edward started the tradition followed by later monarchs of making the abbey both prestigious and remarkable. Not only was it built in the sophisticated Norman style, but it thumbed its nose at churches across the channel – or perhaps, looked down its nose, for it was larger than any abbey in Normandy. Edward was also responsible for bringing the temporal power of royalty within the aura of the spiritual power of the abbey, for he built his palace next to it. And, although the royal family have moved their homes away from the abbey, the seat of government remains within spitting distance even today.

Edward was too ill to attend the consecration of his church on Holy Innocents' Day 1065, and he died a week later. The ex-king developed a posthumous reputation for piety to the extent that he was said to have remained celibate throughout his marriage,[3] and he joined the company of saints in 1161. He also assumed responsibility for being patron saint of England, a job he retained until the more dashing St George usurped his place in 1348. Edward remains to this day the patron of the royal family (which, together with his connection with difficult marriages, might give some of the royals pause for thought).

Edward's coronation regalia remained in use until Cromwell destroyed them, but it's believed that gold from his crown is integrated into the coronation crown used since the restoration of Charles II and known as St Edward's Crown. Edward's relics were solemnly laid to rest in the Abbey in 1163.

The fourth Plantagenet king, Henry III (b. 1207, r. 1216–1272), consolidated Westminster as the permanent seat of government, and this extravagant lover of art and architecture lavished an immense fortune on rebuilding the Abbey in the latest Gothic style. Henry was moved by twin ambitions: a spiritual desire to honour his saintly predecessor and to be buried by his side, and a worldly hunger to equal the glorious royal churches in France. To this end, Henry had a new shrine built for Edward and made provision for his own tomb. And the Cosmati work on each of these weaves them together

FACING PAGE: GETTY IMAGES / PETER MACDIARMID

with the pavement in the sanctuary in one single focus of spiritual power, created under royal patronage.

WHEN IN ROME

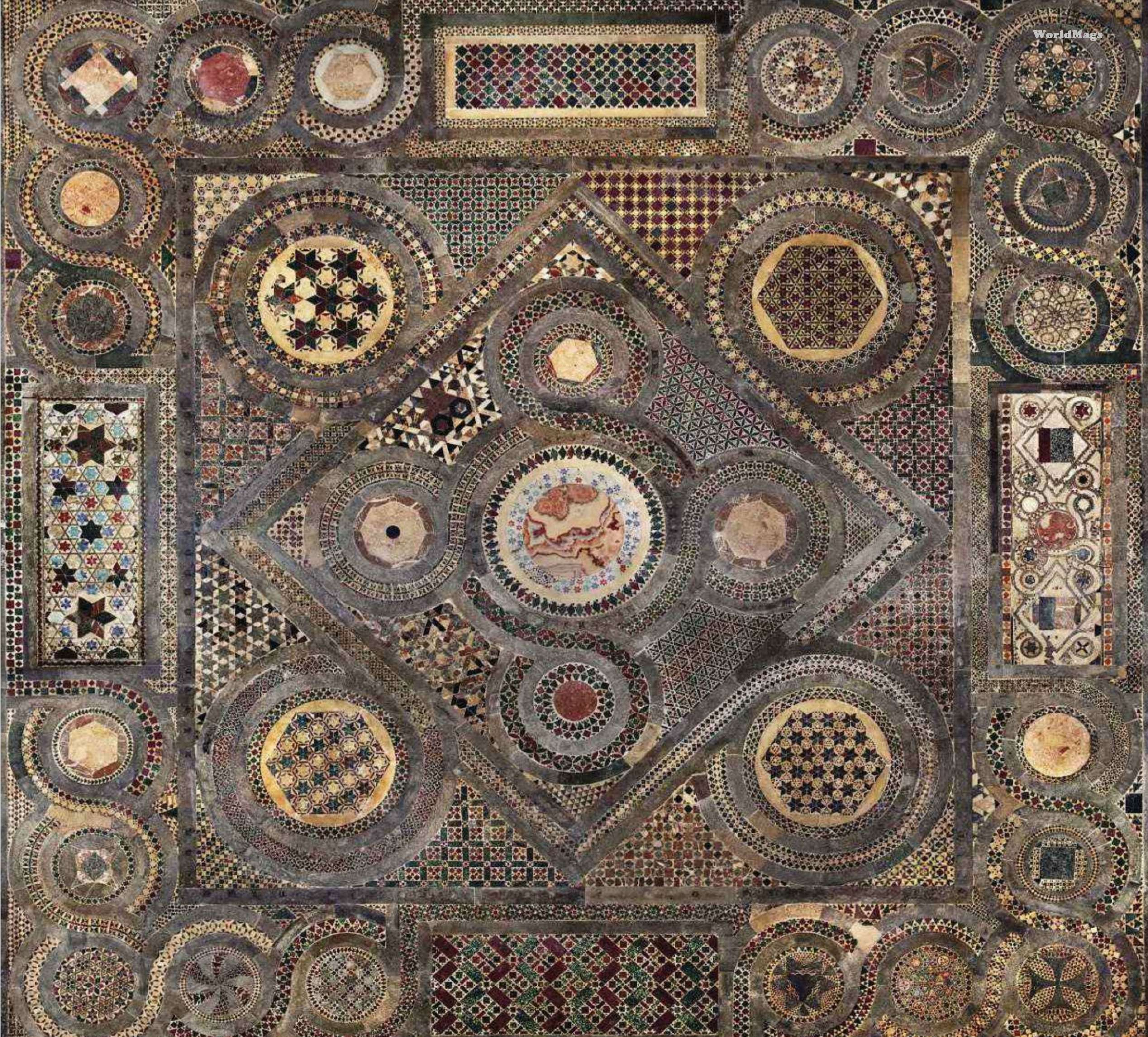
In 1222, the Abbey was granted the rare privilege of coming directly under the Pope's authority, bypassing the Archbishop of Canterbury. Thus when Richard Ware was elected Abbot in 1258, he travelled to Rome to receive his commission. Here he found Pope Alexander IV residing, for political reasons, at his country retreat in Anagni. And in Anagni Cathedral, Richard was confronted with a variety of splendid Cosmati items including pavements, candelabra and the bishop's throne. Nothing like this existed in northern Europe, and Richard clearly decided that Westminster Abbey would gain great prestige by having its own Cosmati pavement. To that end, he returned home accompanied by Italian craftsmen and bearing "stones of porphyry, jasper and marble of Thasos".[4]

Cosmati work, an example of *opus sectile* or 'cut work', originates in Rome. It differs from mosaic in that the pieces are cut in a variety of shapes and set in marble, allowing for a dazzling display of geometric patterns. A variety of materials is used, including glass, so that the finished work glitters and sparkles. Roman craftsmen were used to recycling materials from the ruins of the ancient city, and the porphyry in the Abbey pavement is probably re-used in this way.[5]

Henry had a deadline in mind when his craftsmen set to work: 13 October 1269. He wanted the whole church to be finished by that date, including the saint's shrine. The date was spiritually significant, for 13 October is St Edward's feast day, the date of the first translation of his relics into the Abbey in 1163. What's more, the liturgical calendar for both years was identical, beginning with Easter Day on Sunday 24 March. Significantly, that had happened also in 1258, the year Richard Ware received his commission – but it would not happen again until 1353.[6] Here is the first hint that the pavement's meaning can be found in number; that it has esoteric significance as well as being a statement of power. After all, when Richard Ware visited Anagni, he stepped into an intellectual powerhouse where Albertus Magnus had recently spent time and Thomas Aquinas taught. It's entirely possible that he picked up philosophical ideas that find expression in the pavement.

COSMIC MASONS

Nominative determinism seems to have assigned the name of Cosmati to the family of Roman craftsmen who originated the technique of cut stones. The Abbey pavement is a square carpet of swirling patterns, apparently arranged as a symbolic representation of the Cosmos. What the visitor sees today is pretty much a magnificent ruin – all but 11 letters of



ABOVE: Westminster Abbey's Cosmati pavement in all its glory. Despite damage since its mediæval construction and restorations in the 17th and 19th centuries, it remains a magnificent expression of design and craftsmanship. © Dean & Chapter of Westminster.

the inscriptions are lost, along with most of the original *opus sectile* work. Restorations were carried out in the 17th century, and twice in the 19th century – latterly by that indefatigable restorer of churches, George Gilbert Scott. A close-up view reveals the inferiority of these attempts to repair the exquisite mediæval work. However, the design remains, as does enough of the *opus sectile* work to fire the imagination – and two Westminster monks thoughtfully recorded the inscriptions for posterity.

The pavement is 24ft 10in (7.58m) square, filling almost the entire sanctuary. The border is decorated with five roundels at each corner and an oblong in the middle of each side. Another square is set within at right angles, its corners facing the cardinal points, and its border looping into a roundel at each side. Within this, again, is a figure known as a quincunx: one central roundel surrounded by four more, also looped together by patterned bands. Apart from these bands of plain Purbeck marble, every square inch is decorated with an exuberant variety of geometric patterns. And no two roundels are the same: there are hexagons, a heptagon and an octagon.

The placing of the inscriptions emphasises the triple-zoned nature of the design: one runs around the outer square, the second follows the twining of the band around the four outer circles of the quincunx, and the third surrounds the central roundel.

Right up to the end of the Renaissance, geometry and mathematics were thought of as esoteric subjects closely entwined with magic. After all, Pythagoras taught that numbers were the building blocks of reality and Plato described Creation in mathematical terms. Considered in this light, the pavement becomes a very strange piece of work indeed. In fact, it's unlikely that anyone will, at this late date, ever be able to decode it fully. Theories abound, ranging from the idea that the pavement was intended as a royal mausoleum to a suggestion that the patterns acted as markers for the ritual movements made during a coronation.[7] However, neither of these theories is supported by the inscriptions, which at first glance deepen rather than dispel the mystery.

THE END OF THE WORLD IS NOT NIGH

The inscriptions are in elaborate verse, which is in itself unusual during this period.[8] The outermost one simply gives the names of those responsible for creating the pavement and the date of its completion, but in a rather roundabout way. It can be translated from the Latin thus:

In the Year of Christ one thousand two hundred and twelve plus sixty minus four, King Henry III, the Court of Rome, Odoricus and the Abbot set in place these porphyry stones.[9]

The attributions are clear enough: Henry and Richard Ware commissioned the work from Rome and the craftsman Odoricus led the team who laid the pavement. But the date needs a little more thought. It comes out easily enough as 1268 – but why the weird formula? Scholars have proposed that the floor was laid after Henry's death in 1272, and that the inscription alludes to this date (1,000 + 200 + 12 + 60 = 1272). Moreover, 60 – 4 = 56, the length of Henry's reign.

If the inscription really was laid a few years after the *opus sectile* work was finished, does that mean it was an afterthought? That would imply that it imposed a meaning on the pavement that was not originally intended. However, it's been argued that the inscription is woven into the design in such a sophisticated and complex manner that it must have formed part of the original plan.[10] Others have suggested that the formula was chosen to fit the meter.

Richard Foster has put forward the idea that the numbers four, 12 and 60 were highlighted for esoteric reasons. Four suggests the seasons, 12 the signs of the zodiac or months, and 60 the number of minutes in an hour: thus the formula would hint heavily that the pavement is all about time.[11]

The second inscription develops this theme further, albeit in a riddling manner:

If the reader should prudently consider everything set down, he will find here the end of the primum mobile. *The hedge is of three years; add dogs and horses and men, stags and ravens, eagles, huge sea beasts, the world; whatever follows triples the foregoing years.*[12]

This verse invites its reader to calculate the world's end by tripling each successive lifespan, so that hedgehogs live three years, dogs live nine years, horses 27, and so on. Once again, number is highlighted: this time, the holy number three, associated with the Trinity and with the cycle of creation and destruction (beginning, middle and end; birth, life and death). The total is 19,683 years, although it's not clear whether we should count from the creation of the world or the laying down of the inscription. But why is it here, in this holy place?

The end of the world exercised people's thoughts in mediæval times just as much as in ours. For example, towards the end of the 12th century, the Italian monk Joachim of Fiore (c.1135–1202) predicted the coming of the Age of the Holy Spirit in 1260, effectively marking the end of the world. This heresy caused quite a stir, and the Abbey pavement could be making a counter-claim.[13]

Another suggestion is that the pavement is a kind of insurance for Henry III, a sign that he would rise on Judgement Day alongside his revered saintly predecessor Edward. Henry had his own tomb placed next to Edward's shrine, perhaps another indication that he hoped to enter eternity with the saint.[14]

The third inscription encircles the central roundel and is delightfully simple: *This spherical globe shows the archetypal macrocosm.*[15] Richard Sporley, a 15th-century monk at the Abbey, wrote that the roundel, which is of variegated onyx, shows the four elements of which the macrocosm is made.

Taking the inscriptions as a guide, it's possible to take cautious steps towards interpreting the pavement pattern.

LIFE, THE UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING

The shrine's re-dedication date and the inscriptions indicate that the meaning of the pavement concerns time.[16] The outermost inscription describes everyday time: that of the mundane reality in which we live. The riddle surrounding the roundels calculates eschatological time and tells us when time itself will end. The inner inscription simply says that the archetypal macrocosm *is*: it exists as eternal, spiritual, reality.

Thus the pavement is made up of three zones, representing different types (or perceptions) of time. One of the three inscriptions also calculates in threes, the number of creation. And all these threes are set in a pattern formed by squares – the shape of material reality, which is made up of the four elements.

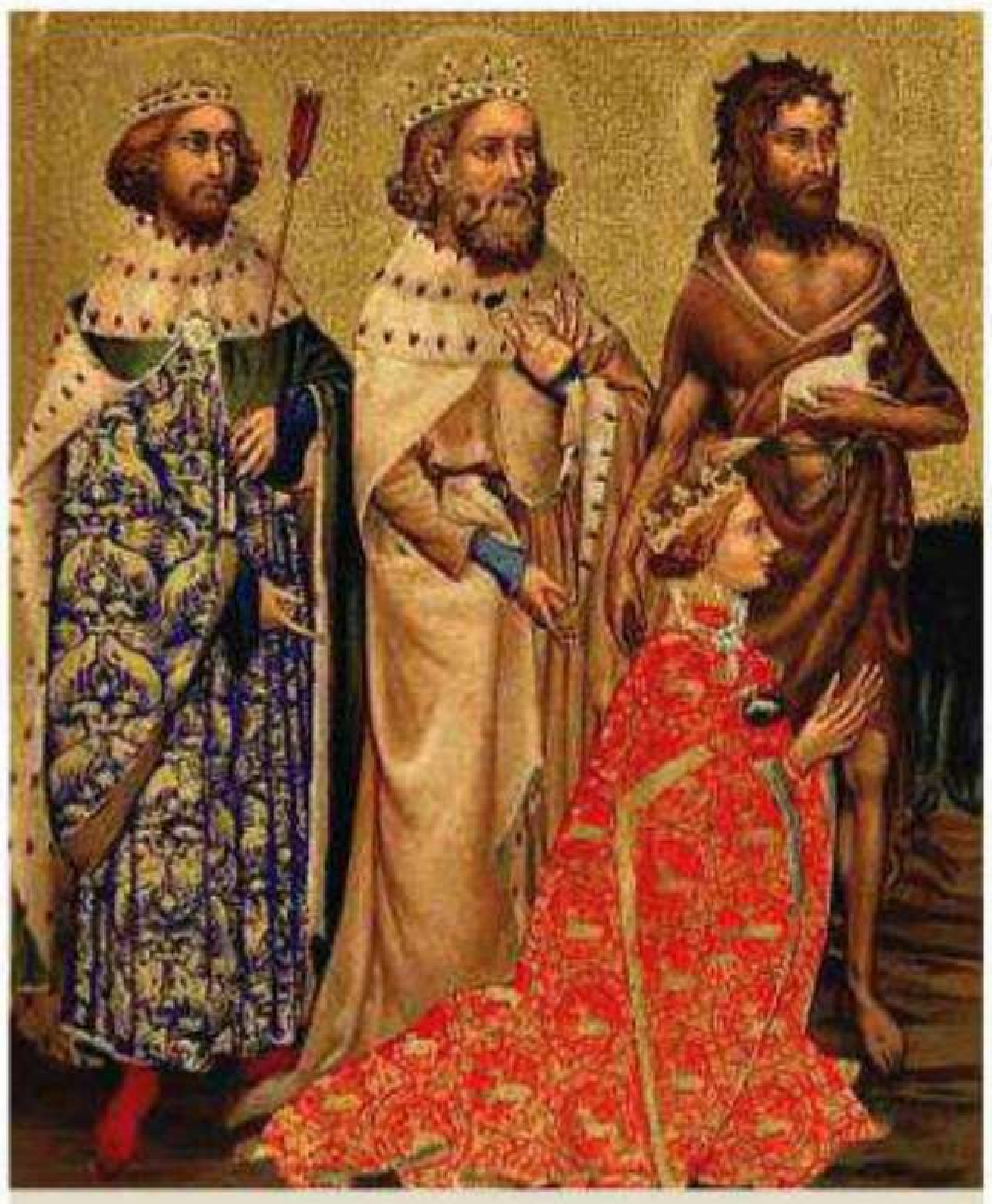
Richard Foster proposes that the four roundels around the central "archetypal macrocosm" represent the pure forms of the elements: earth, air, fire and water. The central roundel, says Sporley, contains all four in a chaotic state. The outermost four roundels would then represent the existence of the elements in the world we know, which is measured by the time described in the bordering inscription. The border roundels could stand for the mixture of elements within material reality – five being found frequently as an organising principle in nature, the created world.[17]

Throughout the pavement, two kinds of figure are emphasised: four- and six-sided. The hexagon may be prominent simply because it's an easy figure to develop into patterns; but on the other hand, it is the first perfect number and refers to the period of creation (six days, according to Genesis).[18]

These are clues, but the number symbolism in the pavement is too deep and arcane for a short article; interested readers are recommended to read Richard Foster's admirable work. But it's possible to say with reasonable confidence that the pavement seems to be an elegant visual meditation on the mediæval understanding of the Cosmos, its hierarchy of material and spiritual levels and the passing of time contrasted with the revelation of eternity. It is a vision of the Cosmos as perfect and orderly, ruled by divine law. But how likely is it that the craftsmen would have been doing anything more than creating a pretty pattern?

For one thing, the outer inscription clearly states that Henry III and Richard Ware are responsible for the creation of the pavement. And during this period, whoever commissioned a work of art would give the artists involved a detailed programme for its creation. As mentioned above, Ware had the chance of mingling with intellectual stars of the Church in Anagni, and he could well have returned to England fired with the idea of proving his own esoteric knowledge the equal of theirs.

As for the craftsmen, Richard Foster



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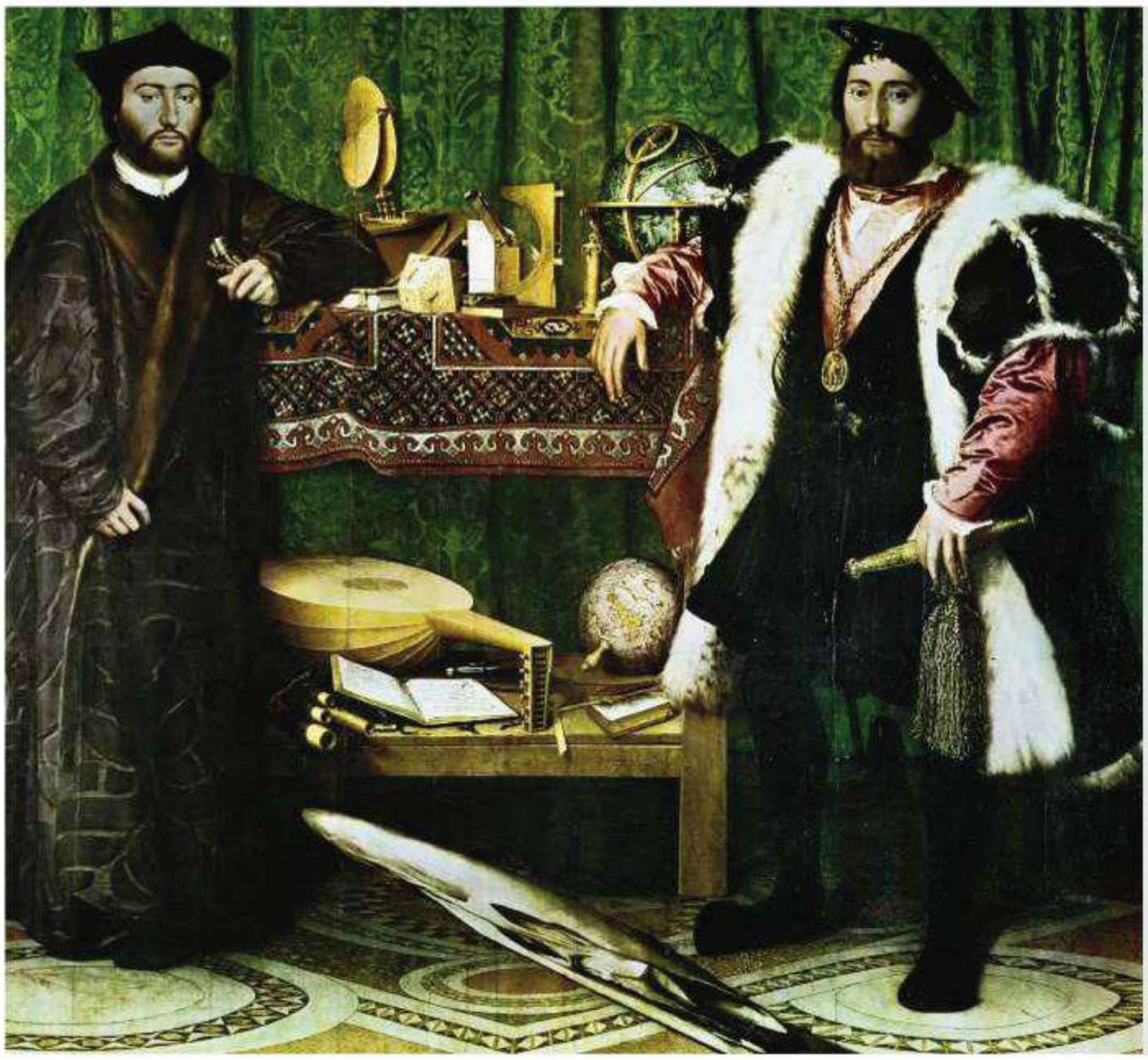
KINGS IN HEAVEN

In the exquisite painting, known as the Wilton Diptych (c.1395), King Richard II accepts a pennant of St George's Cross from the Virgin and Child. Behind Richard stand Edmund the Martyr, Edward the Confessor, and John the Baptist. Edward holds the ring that, according to legend, he gave to a poor pilgrim who later revealed himself to be the Baptist. Richard was devoted to all three saints.

Sanctity and power unite in this picture, just as they do in the Cosmati pavement. Here are three kings, utterly at home in the elegant court of heaven. Clearly the angels favour Richard: they wear golden pendants of broom (*planta genista*, a pun on Plantagenet) and brooches of Richard's personal emblem the white hart. The pennant staff is tipped with an orb showing a minute scene of an idealised landscape: Richard is entrusted with creating heavenly order in his own realm of England.



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HOLBEIN'S RIDDLES

Two splendidly dressed men stand on a Cosmati pavement, an array of books, musical instruments and scientific equipment between them. Across the lower part of the painting is a weird shape that only reveals itself to be a skull when viewed from below and to the right of the picture.

Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) continues to puzzle viewers (see "The Holbein Code", **FT202:32–37** for a full account), even though research has uncovered the men's identities. The instruments may allude to religious discord, and the skull signifies mortality. Since this painting is deliberately playful and arcane, it's possible that Holbein chose to depict Cosmati work to deepen the sense of mystery. However, although the floor is clearly based on the Abbey pavement, the pattern is massively simplified, with plain marble taking the place of the geometric infills. Despite Holbein's formidable talent and technique, it looks as if painting the intricacies of Cosmati work defeated him.

notes that they necessarily had a technical knowledge of geometry, and may also have understood something of the symbolic overtones of their creations. In Cosmati work, all the four-fold patterns are based on the technique known as "doubling the square", which was familiar to mediæval stonemasons.[19] Now, this is the problem Socrates sets a young slave boy in Plato's dialogue *Meno* – and from it, Socrates deduces that the soul has knowledge of the ideal world of Forms before it incarnates. According to the late John Michell, this tale could be a parable of the immortality of the soul.[20] Thus, the pavement might be intended to lead the viewer towards a revelation of the true order of reality.

Whatever the truth, until now the secrets of the pavement have remained hidden from all but a few – for only the clergy are allowed to enter the sanctuary. And not even the priests would have had a perfect view of it, even if they climbed up into the triforium. Only someone hovering directly above the pavement would see it in its perfection. Like so much in a mediæval church, it appears to have been designed for God's eyes. The Creator can gaze down on an emblem of magnificent beauty and perfect, geometric order: a depiction, in fact, of His divinely created Cosmos.

And the pavement still weaves together holiness and mundane power. For at each coronation, the monarch is crowned while sitting on the Coronation Chair placed directly on the central roundel. Perhaps the fledgling king or queen is expected to consider his or her place in a Cosmos ruled by God and spinning towards Judgement Day. When monarchs were believed to rule by Divine Right, the king or queen represented God's law: seated upon the macrocosm, the monarch assumed rule over a microcosm of perfect heavenly order, the realm. As St Edward's Crown is placed on his head, the new monarch becomes effectively a modern equivalent of the saintly king himself. That's something for the Prince of Wales to consider, should his day ever come.

WHO HAS THE ANSWER?

On the south side of the Abbey cloisters is a monument to MI5, SIS and GCHQ. Made of mottled grey marble, it's in the shape of the quincunx from the pavement, with its inscription running around the four orbiting roundels in imitation of the original. Is this merely a jest about codes and secrets? Or has the pavement truly been decoded, and are the answers hidden in a file in Thames House, just a few hundred yards upriver from the Abbey? FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

RUTH CLYDESDALE researches Renaissance astrology and esoteric themes in art. She is the author of *Secret Wisdom* (Arcturus, 2009). Her new book, *The Happiness Workbook*, will be out soon – it is a great deal better than it sounds. She lives in the Burgundian duchy of Pimlico.

NOTES

1 See www.westminster-abbey.org for details of admission to the pavement and shrine. The feretory is accessible to small groups on guided tours, and open twice daily for prayers at 11am and 3pm.

2 It's slightly disappointing to learn that all Edward confessed was his Christianity. The title helps differentiate him from Edward the Martyr.

3 Presumably the reason why Edward is the patron saint of troubled marriages.

4 John Flete, a 15th-century chronicler of the Abbey, quoted in Richard Jenkyns: *Westminster Abbey*, Profile Books, 2004, p36.

5 Porphyry has long been associated with kingship, because of its purple colour. The generous use of it in the pavement possibly emphasises Henry's authority, which he almost lost at several points during his reign.

6 See David Carpenter: "Westminster Abbey and the Cosmati pavements in politics", in Lindy Grant and Richard Mortimer, eds: *Westminster Abbey: The Cosmati pavements*, Ashgate Publishers, Aldershot, 2002, p42.

7 See for example Paul Binski: "The Cosmati at Westminster and the English Court Style", *Art Bulletin*, v72 No.1 pp29, 31–33.

8 See Richard Foster: *Patterns of Thought: The Hidden Meaning of the Great Pavement of Westminster Abbey*, Jonathan Cape, 1991, p80.

9 Adapted from Foster, *op.cit.*, pp91, 109.

10 Christopher Norton: "The Luxury pavement in England before Westminster", in Grant and Mortimer, *op.cit.*, p22; and Carpenter, *op.cit.*, p45.

11 See Foster, *op.cit.*, p92.

12 Jenkyns, *op.cit.*, p38.

13 See Foster, *op.cit.*, p161.

14 See Carpenter in Grant and Mortimer, *op.cit.*, p45.

15 Jenkyns, *op.cit.*, p38.

16 The following paragraphs are heavily indebted to Richard Foster's *Patterns of Thought.*

17 See John Michell: *How the World is Made: The Story of Creation according to Sacred Geometry*, Thames & Hudson, 2009, p166.

18 *Ibid*, p119.

19 See Foster, *op.cit.*, p118.

20 See Michell, *op.cit.*, p113. Although most of Plato's work had been lost to view in Europe by the 13th century, *Meno* was known.

TUSCANY, 1944. THE 92ND INFANTRY ASSAULTED THE HEART OF THE ROME-BERLIN AXIS. THIS IS THEIR STORY.

FROM **SPIKE LEE** : DIRECTOR OF INSIDE MAN

JOHN TURTURRO JOSEPH GORDON LEVITT JOHN LEGUIZAMO PIERFRANCESCO FAVINO

MIRACLE at ST ANNA

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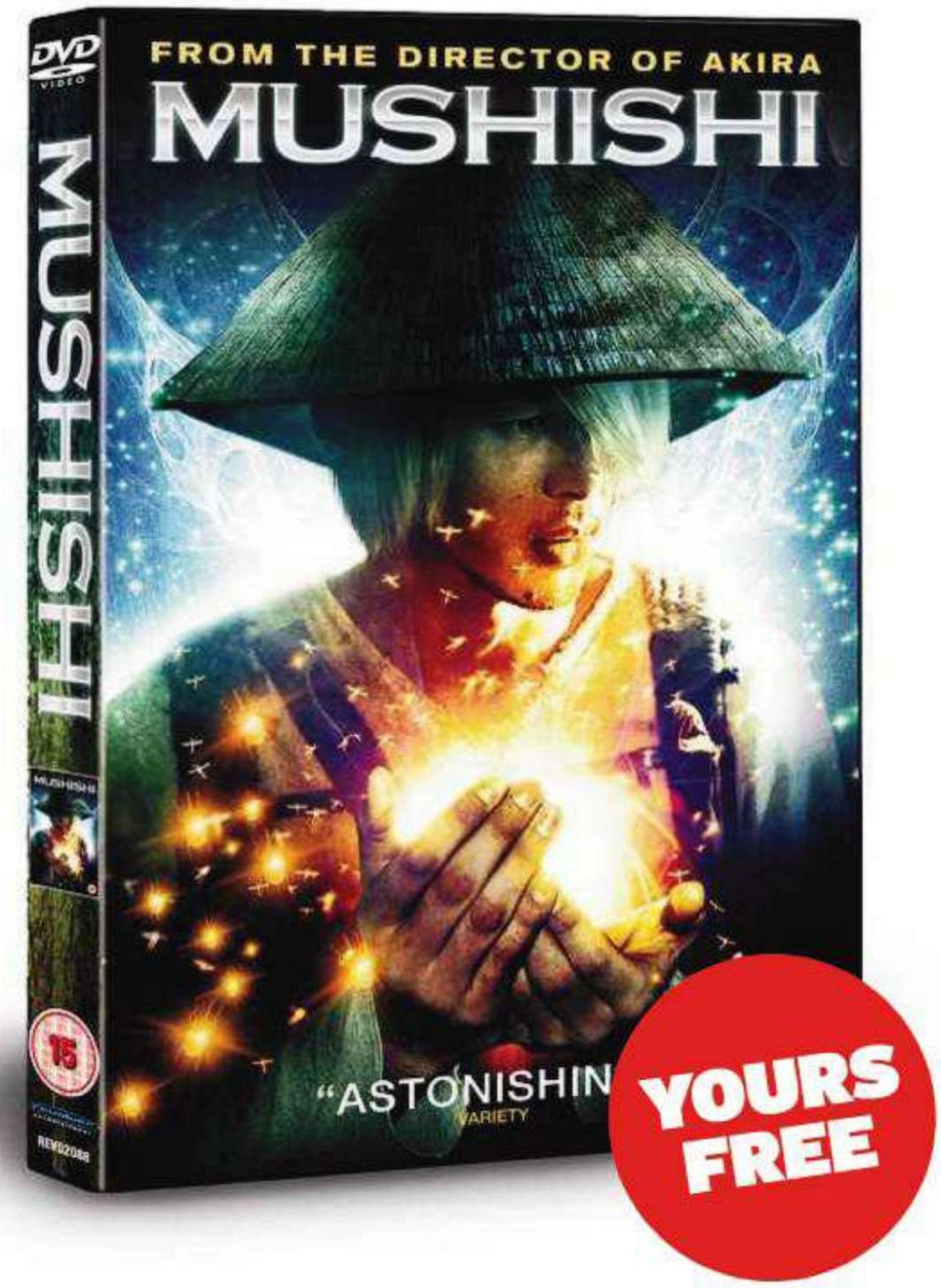

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forum

The Great Stone Face

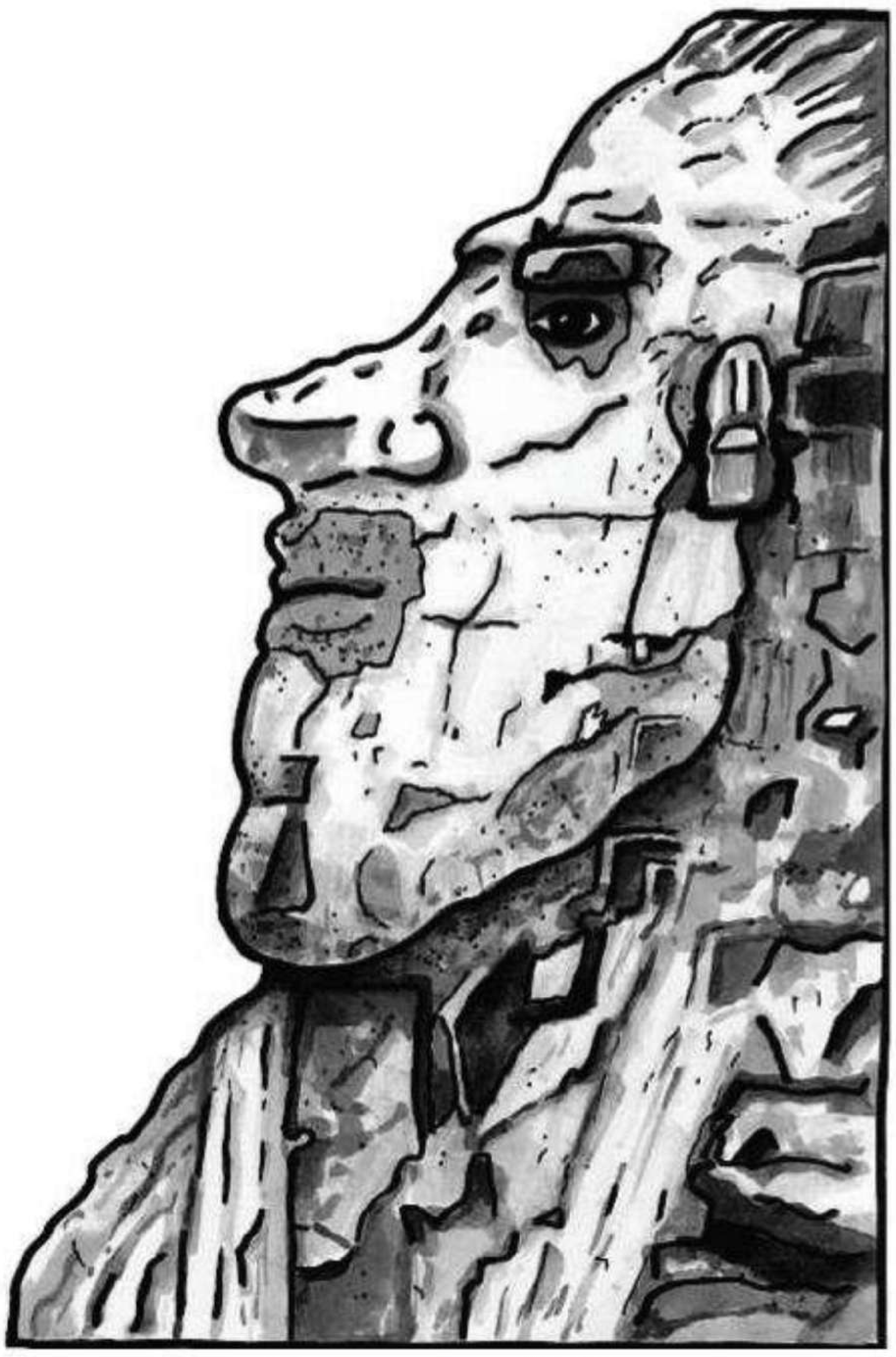
JEFFREY VALLANCE revisits the legend of the Old Man of the Mountain and finds evidence of a curious transformation.

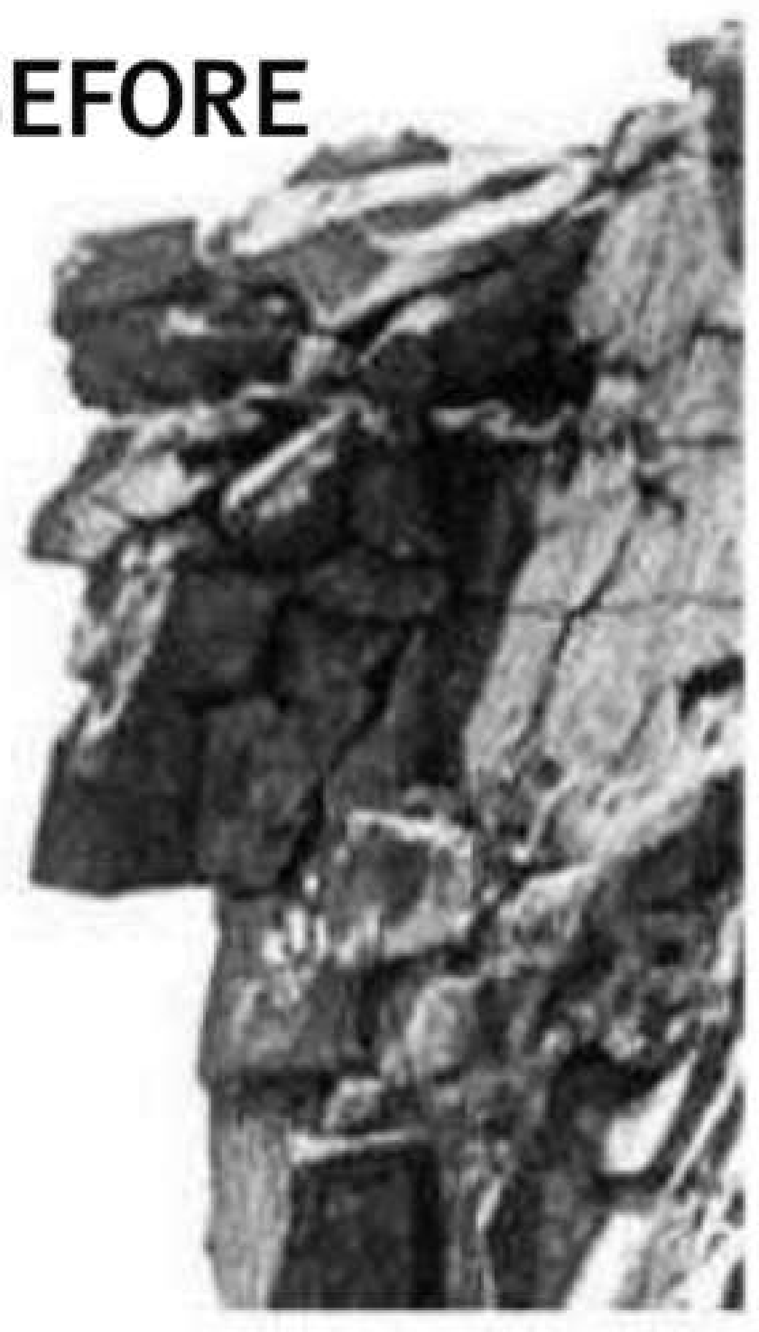
JEFFREY VALLANCE has made it his life's work to collect spontaneous images of Richard Nixon found on rocks, stains, various vegetables, and other diverse substances.

Millions of years ago, the great ice sheets that had covered North America receded, leaving behind a simulacrum of a human face in profile sculpted into a granite cliff on Cannon Mountain, in what is now New Hampshire. The rocky visage came to be known as the Old Man of the Mountain. Native Americans belonging to the Sagamore tribe have a legend about how the Old Man of the Mountain came to be. Once there was a great warrior chief named Pemigewasset, who married a woman named Minerwa, the beautiful daughter of a Mohawk chief. Minerwa was a powerful medicine woman, practiced in the art of herbs and potions. One day, Minerwa was called away to nurse her dying father. After she left, Chief Pemigewasset kept a vigil atop a cliff every day, waiting for his wife's return. Many days passed, until, one bitterly cold winter night, Pemigewasset died upon the cliff and froze solid, never having seen his wife's return. As a memorial to his great vigilance, the Great Spirit carved the chief's likeness upon the face of the cliff. Thereafter, people from all around came to see the great stone face, which eventually became New Hampshire's state symbol, appearing on stamps, coins, license plates and gaudy souvenirs.

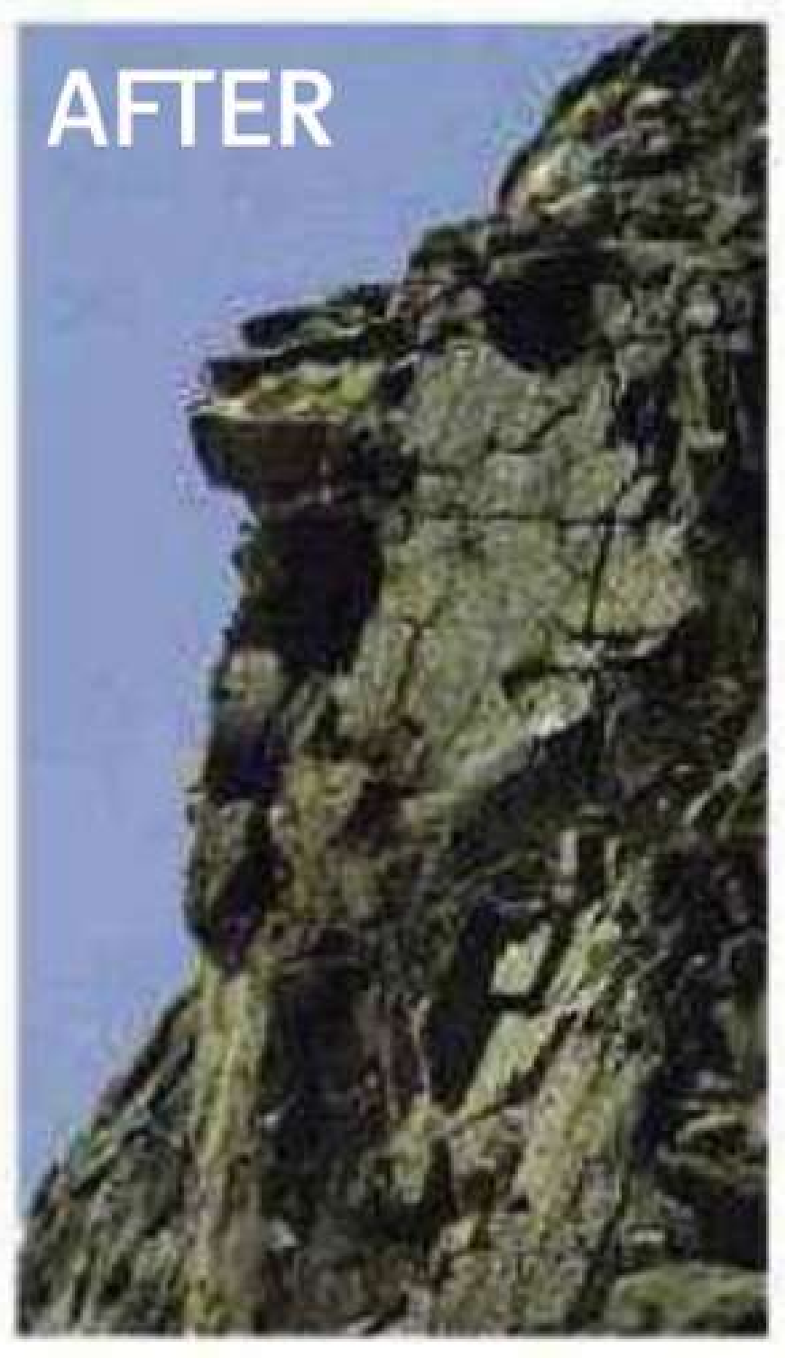
In the early morning on 3 May 2003, the Old Man of the Mountain came crashing down [**FT172:5**]. Some say that upon his falling, the spirit of Chief Pemigewasset had been released from his vigil at last, and he was free to be reunited with his beloved Minerwa in the Happy Hunting Ground.

But the Great Spirit was not finished with the cliff on Cannon Mountain. For as the old face fell away, a new face appeared in its place – a face many now see as a resemblance of former United States president Richard Milhous Nixon.





BEFORE



AFTER

There, chiselled in granite, is a likeness of the disgraced ex-president's infamous profile – his trademark ski-jump nose, sloping forehead, heavy eyebrows, swelling jowls and sneering grin. Mr Nixon may not have been carved in stone alongside America's more beloved presidents at Mt Rushmore, but on Cannon Mountain some force seems to have carved out his peculiar effigy.

In 1850, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a story called "The Great Stone Face", which tells of a prophecy associated with the Old Man of the Mountain: "The purport was, that, at some future day, a child should be born hereabouts, who was destined to become the greatest and noblest personage of his time, and whose countenance, in manhood, should bear an exact resemblance to the Great Stone Face." Residents of New Hampshire waited for that man who would prove to be much greater or nobler than his neighbours. Could the prophecy have foretold the advent of Nixon?

On 12 March 1968, Richard M Nixon won a resounding victory in the New Hampshire primary, winning 78 per cent of the vote. New Hampshire's primary is considered crucial, as it is always first in the nationwide primary elections, held every four years as part of the process of choosing nominees for the presidential elections. Four years later, on 7 March 1972, Nixon once again won New Hampshire, and went on to his second term as president, from which he resigned on 9 August 1974, due to the Watergate scandal.

The great state of New Hampshire always figured highly in Nixon's political career, and he professed a special affinity for its people. On 7 January 1972, President Nixon wrote a letter to the New Hampshire Committee for Re-election of the President, declaring his candidacy. "It was in New Hampshire that I began my campaign for the presidency four years ago, and I remember well the opportunity that campaign provided to visit so much of the state and to meet so many of its people. I have tried to be true to the trust they expressed, and to carry forward the effort we began in New Hampshire in 1968: to bring peace and progress both abroad and at home, and to give America the leadership it needs for a new era of national greatness."

Nixon was the king of political comebacks. When his image replaced the face of the old Indian chief, it was almost as if his spirit were taking the chief's place in eternal vigilance – except instead of waiting for his life's love to return, Nixon is waiting for his tarnished political image to be restored. He may have to wait one hell of a long time. FT

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ALL PIX: JEFFREY VALLANCE

The Kate Bush Enigma

Since her appearance on the music scene in 1978, Kate Bush has been associated in the public mind with a cornucopia of "paranormal" themes and ideas. But where do media hype, fiction and wishful thinking end and the truth begin? **ROBERT MOORE** asks whether we can separate the real person from the pop persona.

ROBERT MOORE has researched UFOs and paranormal activity for several decades and followed the twists and turns in Kate Bush's personal story for almost as long.

Few contemporary musical artists embody "enigmatic" as well as the English singer-songwriter Kate Bush. Despite numerous biographies and a career spanning almost four decades, Bush remains an unknown quantity. The comment by BBC 6 Music reporter Mark Sutherland that "even after more than 20 years we really don't know much about her" defines her public image as effectively today as in 1978, the date of Bush's debut single, "Wuthering Heights".[1]

The May 2011 release of Bush's new album *Director's Cut* will doubtless see such sentiments aired once again. Within a week of its release, *Director's Cut* had reached number one on the Radio 1 album charts.

While other female recording artists are equally "mysterious", they don't seem to attract the same degree of intense bemusement. Bush's enigmatic image is, however, mostly an illusion, given the various published biographies (albeit unofficial and of variable quality) and numerous interviews in existence. We actually know quite a lot about the childhood and artistic flowering of this East Wickham doctor's daughter, from her days at St Joseph's Convent Grammar School to her various homes, lovers, pets and interests; a life focused on a close family unit steeped in music, bohemianism and modest counter-cultural values.[2]

Following an unofficial "apprenticeship" with EMI where Bush honed her musical, dance and mime skills, she burst onto the pop scene with that now iconic debut single. As a result of the song's promotional video, Bush became eternally linked (or mixed up) in the public consciousness with the white-robed ghost of Catherine ("Cathy") Earnshaw. The result was an "ethereal hippie" persona that's been hard to shake and which reflects the general public's perennial inability to separate "performer" from "performance". A notable irony is that the ghost of Cathy is never explicitly seen in Emily Brontë's original 1847 book, outside of fantasies, inference or rumours, only directly manifesting once within a dream-like experience in the form of a child. Bush's "Cathy" is a unique interpretation of this character (it's also tempting to speculate on whether the striking high-pitched vocalisation the singer used in the song – clearly intended to create a spectral impression – might have been influenced by Banshee legends known to the Irish side of her family).

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ABOVE: Kate Bush in her 1978 video for "Wuthering Heights".

The ghost of Cathy is never seen in the original novel

The creation of the Bush persona was reinforced by public comments she made early in her musical career in relation to astrology, reincarnation and UFOs, while her 1978 song "Strange Phenomena" (*The Kick Inside*) made various references to synchronicity. It is notable that "Wuthering Heights" was associated with a number of coincidences of personal significance to Bush. For example, she noted at an early stage the similarity in Christian names between the book's main female character and herself (Bush was called "Cathy" as a child) and subsequently discovered she shared her 30 July birthday with Emily Brontë.

Bush's subsequent compositions typically evoked rich, varied soundscapes from a third person lyrical perspective. After the now legendary 1979 tour, Bush became notably studio-bound, producing six albums from 1980 to 1993. Of these, her 1985 release *The Hounds of Love* is often deemed the most significant. The album is especially cherished for its conceptual "B" side *The Ninth Wave*, a set of themed compositions representing the life-review of a drowning person (see **FT159:34–40**).

As a consequence of such unique output, Bush has become Britain's most significant practitioner of the art rock music genre. But how and why has the *public* image of Kate Bush acquired such an air of mystery? Her famously prolonged gaps between album releases, combined with her apparent invisibility during her creative gestations, must surely been a factor. Some casual observers, while acknowledging her creativity, find it difficult to place her music, not least due to its often undefined boundary between dream and reality. So while the person, in some senses, *is* clearly in the music, our definition of Kate Bush has been made problematic by the very artistic conventions she employs.

Furthermore, while many details of Bush's life are known, we lack an officially confirmed life story. Bush's early 1980s autobiography *Leaving My Tracks* was never finished, while *Cathy* – a planned photographic trilogy documenting her childhood – was abandoned after only one volume.[3] Since the mid-1990s, her media image has been that of a "recluse". Whether this reflects her rumoured shyness, a reaction to past media intrusions, an artistic requirement for isolation or subtle cultivation of mystique remains a subject of debate.

From a fortean perspective, Bush is a person of some interest, associated with a potent mix of circumstantial evidence, hints and unattested rumours. One early biographical effort alleged her childhood home was haunted, although the accounts cited are all third-hand.[4] More notably, in 1981 Bush included the account of a purported UFO sighting near Loch Ness within her (now long defunct) fanzine: "Just as it was getting dark… we pulled up by a sign at the edge of the road. It told of a fort from the fifth century, BC… [and] a phantom battle which had supposedly taken place very near to the site. As we were about to drive away, I noticed three lights in the sky, descending in a diagonal line. Then they formed a horizontal line and remained static just below a layer of cloud… We thought maybe they were some kind of stadium lights, but they were too near to the clouds; and we had never seen aircraft with such big lights, nor that colour… we could see that they were completely unattached to any form of structure on the ground; and now there were only two… They remained stationary until we lost them a little while later, for good… We wondered if instead of finding Nessie on our search, we had found another strange phenomenon…"[5]

Unfortunately, the author has been unable to find a reference to such a UFO being seen in the area at this time. Previous issues of Bush's fanzine, however, included several works of her surrealist fiction; could this be another?

Jenny Randles's 1988 book *Abduction* cites another rumour that Bush was reputedly at one time "the president of a West Country UFO group",[6] an allegation the author has heard elsewhere but never been able to clarify. There are other allegations that Bush visited Warminster to participate in skywatches, while faint memories of her supposed interest in ufology have persisted into comparatively recent times. During the late 1990s, it is strongly rumoured, she was invited to a skywatch in Rendlesham Forest.

Nonetheless, Bush did make the following comment regarding UFOs in 1980: "I really believe in UFOs, and I don't see why there shouldn't be life on other planets. We haven't got off this planet yet, really, so how can we say if there is or isn't? It seems unlikely that we would be the only ones. There have been so many reported that I'm sure they exist, and I really hope I see one…"[7] While this demonstrates some interest in this topic, it appears to be of a relatively casual sort of the kind associated with other pop musicians of the time.

KATE BUSH
DIRECTOR'S CUT

Cloudbusting
Kate Bush

There have been other claims of fortean or New Age interests. The most significant and most concrete of these is Bush's interest in the ideas of Greek-Armenian mystic George Gurdjieff, who pioneered an esoteric system of self- improvement termed "The Fourth Way". This is supported by interview statements and lyrics: "Them Heavy People" even directly name-checks Gurdjieff.

Other subjects featured in Bush's lyrics include auras, ghosts, Out-Of-Body Experiences, Spiritualism, past lives, reincarnation and karma. No song, however, overtly references UFOs; although three relate to issues popular with conspiracy theorists: sonic weapons ("Experiment IV"), Elvis survival claims ("King of the Mountain") alternative/free energy and weather control ("Cloudbusting").

"Cloudbusting" (1985), might be the most significant of her fortean-themed songs. It alludes to the proposal by Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) of the existence of a mysterious life-energy termed Orgone he felt had various practical applications – most notably when utilised by a weather control device termed a "Cloud-buster". Bush encountered these ideas indirectly through a book entitled *The Book of Dreams* written by Reich's son Peter. As a consequence, the song reflects the book's emphasis on Peter's relationship with his father; hence, "Cloudbusting" mentions "Orgonon" (the farm Reich bought to carry out his experiments) but not "Orgone". Peter Reich's book also presented Bush with an unclear impression of a cloudbuster's appearance. HR Giger's design for the video offered a more æsthetically pleasing and visually impressive vision than the utilitarian ugliness of the real thing.

Equally arcane was a song from Bush's 1993 album *The Red Shoes*. "Lily" seemingly featured aspects of a Golden Dawn rite termed "The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram".[8] While it instigated some unsubstantiated fan rumours, Bush simply ascribed its inspiration to a friendship she incidentally cultivated with a "spiritual healer".[9] The author subsequently discovered that the elderly female recounting a westernised *Gayatr Mantra* on the song's opening lines was probably the late Lily Cornford, co-founder of the London-based *Maitreya School of Healing*.[10]

Even the choice of "Fish People" as the name of her new label has generated speculation among Bush devotees, its inspiration being variously ascribed to a 1967 *Doctor Who* story entitled "The Underwater Menace", the Atlantis myth, or HP Lovecraft's tales of the fishy, Dagon-worshipping Deep Ones which interbreed with humans.

The degree and persistence of her interest in the esoteric is unknown. We therefore have no idea how the contemporary Kate Bush feels about such issues – her rumoured recent meeting with arch rationalist Philip Pullman suggests they could have changed significantly.

Nonetheless, a May 2011 BBC Radio 4 *Front Row* interview featured the "revelation" that Bush had accidentally placed a lump of bonemeal on her piano – an act she subsequently felt "helped her songs grow".[11] Here, then, is the "Kate Bush Enigma" in microcosm; do such expressions indicate an innate mysticism, a rich creative imagination or a synthesis of both dispositions? FT

NOTES

1 BBC.co.uk: The sensual world of Kate Bush (31 Oct 2005); http://bbc.in/jWw3ou.

2 Most notably F Vermorel: *Princess of Suburbia*, Omnibus 1980; *Kate Bush and the Strange Art of Pop*, Omnibus 1983; K Canns & S Mayes: *Kate Bush: A visual Documentary*, Omnibus 1988; R Jovanovic: *Kate Bush The Biography*, Portrait 2005; G Thomson: *Under The Ivy*, Omnibus 2010. Many interviews and commentaries are contained on sites such as Gaffaweb: http://gaffa.org/.

3 JC Bush: *Cathy*, Kindlight, 1986.

4 Vermorel, *op.cit.*, p6.

5 Original account in Kate Bush Club fanletter, Issue 11, Xmas 1981.

6 J Randles: *Abduction*, Headline, 1988, p151.

7 Kate Bush Club newsletter Issue 5, 1978.

8 i.e. http://bit.ly/ba8Vss (kheper.net).

9 Jovanovic, *op.cit.*, pp188–189.

10 http://bit.ly/jlrdbo (maitreyaschool andhealingcentre. org.uk).

11 Interview, BBC Radio 4, Front Row 4 May 2011 (Section: 0:11:38 – 0:12:20).

Editor's note: For a time in the 1970s, Kate Bush was a *Fortean Times* subscriber.

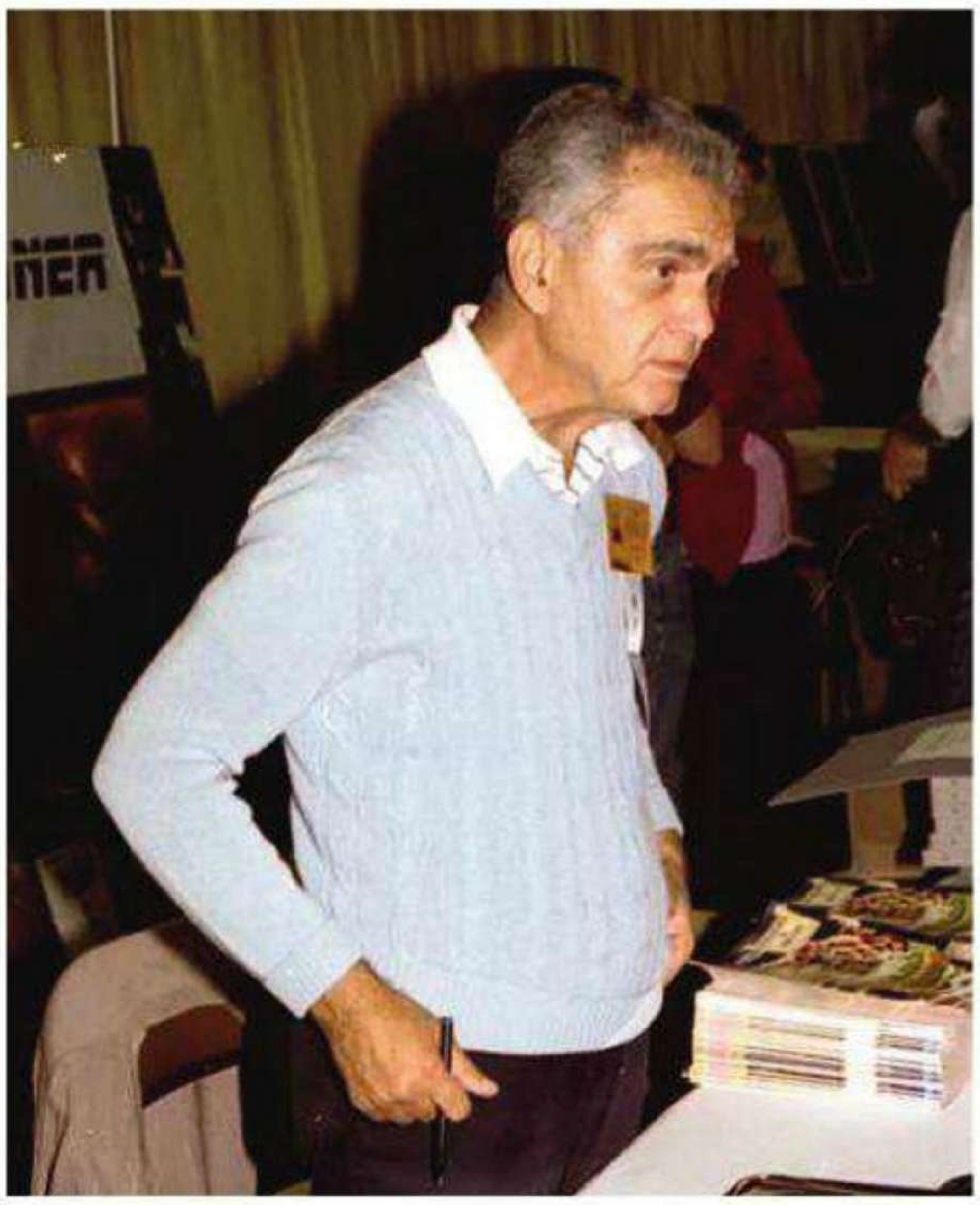
The Morning of the Mutants

As *X-Men: First Class* brings the backstory of Marvel's mutant superheroes to the big screen, **ROBERT GUFFEY** unearths their real origin in the occult conspiracies and paranormal obsessions that fascinated their creator – comic book legend Jack Kirby.

ROBERT GUFFEY is a freelance writer who has published short stories and non-fiction articles. He currently resides in the southwest USA and is married with two kids and a menagerie.

Jack Kirby, a pioneering American comic book artist, created or co-created such well-known superheroes as The Fantastic Four, The Hulk, Iron Man, The Silver Surfer, Thor and The X-Men. Since their very first appearances in comic book form way back in the 1960s, these larger-than-life characters have taken on an almost mythological significance in the public consciousness, thanks in no small part to a spate of recent film adaptations that have been extraordinarily successful… almost as successful as the always-burgeoning subgenre known as "conspiracy theory". In fact, it could be argued that superheroes and conspiracy theories have experienced a parallel rise in prominence – and that Kirby represents a nexus point between them.

In today's popular media, the subject of occult conspiracies has become common fodder for best-selling novels, multi-million-dollar blockbuster movies and long-running television shows, but Kirby's fascination with such fringe subject matter can be traced back far earlier than that. As with so many other popular trends, Kirby was decades ahead of the pack. He took a close interest in the paranormal from early in his career, perhaps due to his upbringing. In an interview in the early 1990s, Kirby revealed that when he was very young the rabbis in his neighbourhood had introduced him to the concept of demons which could possess human beings. "This kind of thing was very real," he said, "and I think it added to the type of storytelling that I would do later on in life." [1]



ALAN LIGHT

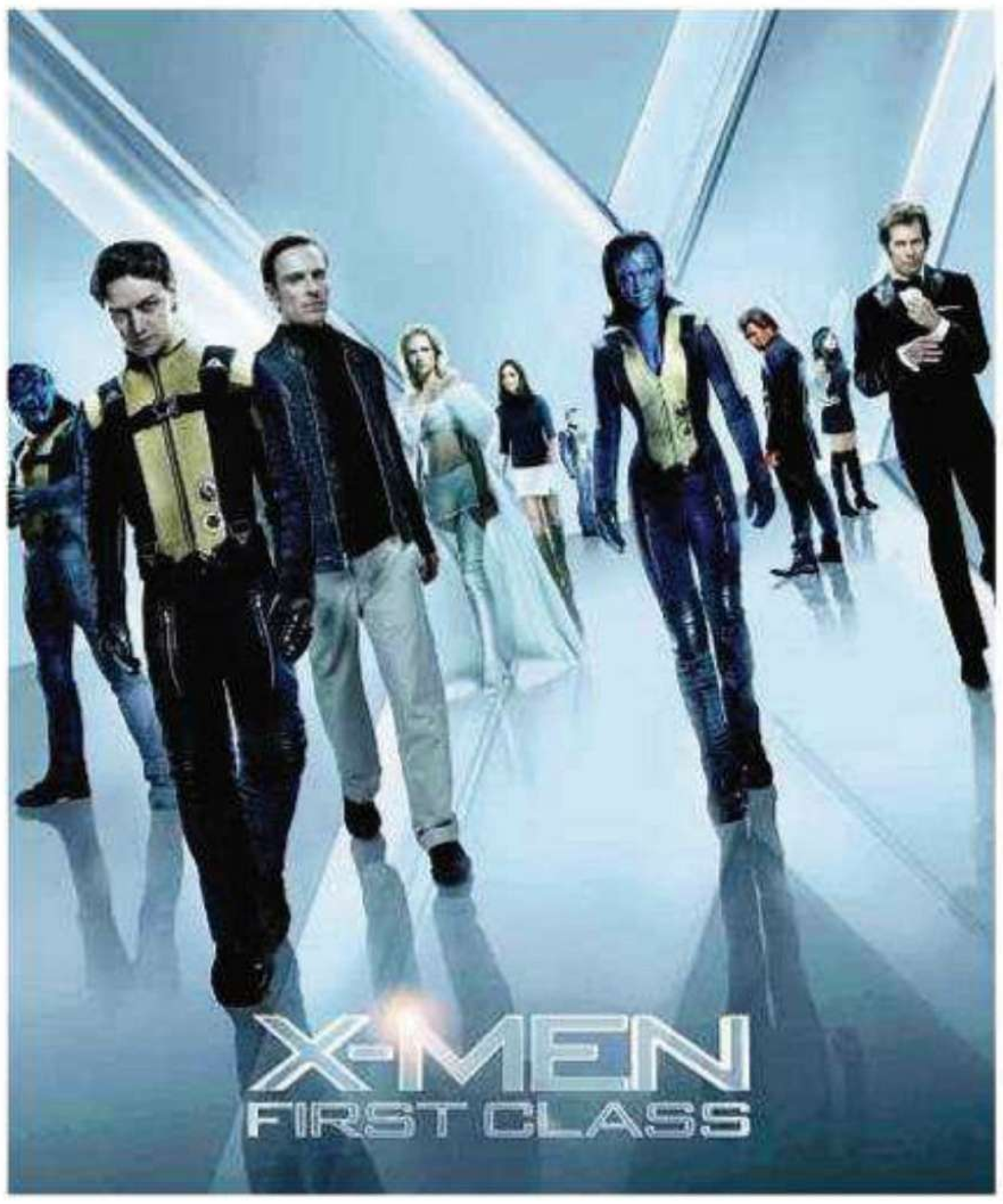
ABOVE: Jack Kirby at the San Diego Comic Convention in 1982.

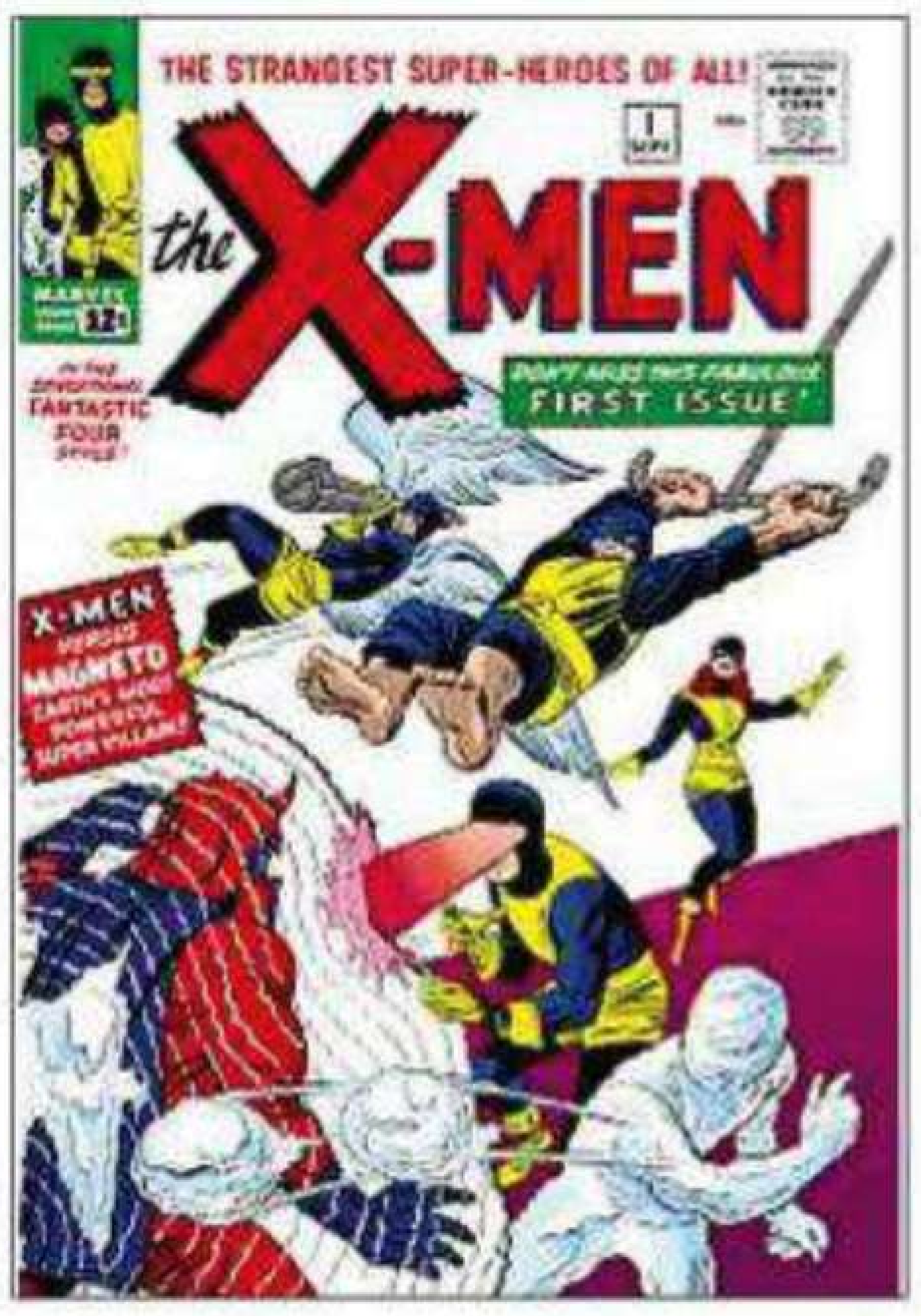
The notion of invisible forces runs right through Kirby's work

This notion of invisible forces controlling human beings from behind the scenes runs right through Kirby's œuvre. Sometimes, this interest manifests itself in the form of epic stories about gods and goddesses interfering with the course of human lives. *The Mighty Thor* (on which Kirby worked from 1962 to 1970), *The New Gods* (1971–72), and *The Eternals* (1976–78) are just three examples. Sometimes, this obsession takes a far more prosaic form: stories about secret societies composed of powerful beings – sometimes human, sometimes not – quietly affecting the course of human affairs from within the shadows. Sometimes, these beings were attempting to affect the course of civilisation solely for their own benefit. Others believed they were attempting to *help* humanity, while in truth they were destroying it. And sometimes these beings acted as selfless benefactors of the human race. There are numerous examples of all three of these story-types throughout Kirby's work. An example of the first story-type can be found in Kirby's "Madbomb" saga, which was published in the pages of *Captain America* #193–200 (Jan to Aug 1976) while America eagerly looked forward to its bicentennial celebration. The story involves a secret society of British-sympathising bluebloods who fancy themselves "the 'chosen' Elite" [2] and attempt to use a high-tech sonic wave projector to artificially induce racial strife and riots throughout the country in order to cause as much chaos as possible among the benighted underclass. This plot sounds so close to the real-life accusations of such conspiracy theorists as perennial Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche (who believes the Queen of England still runs America) that it's hard to imagine Kirby wasn't aware of these theories when he wrote the "Madbomb" story. Kirby's science fiction series *The Eternals* (originally entitled *The Return of the Gods*) was inspired by Erich Von Däniken's cosmic conspiracy tome *The Chariots of the Gods* (1968), which attempts to prove that the entire course of human civilisation was manipulated by a different sort of "chosen Elite", one that hails from the stars (see **FT169:30–37; 270:34–39**). Since *The Eternals* was published around the same time, it's not illogical to deduce that Kirby was aware of LaRouche's convoluted conspiratorial musings as well.

An example of the second story-type is Kirby's "Him" storyline published in *Fantastic Four* #66 and 67 in the summer of 1967. As originally conceived by Kirby, this story was about a secret society of scientists so obsessed with Objectivism that they attempt to create a perfect being, per the philosophy of Ayn Rand and her libertarian peers. This perfect being (known only as "Him") turns on his creators and destroys them since he cannot tolerate the flaws of lesser men. Unfortunately, the subtler nuances of the tale were altered drastically in the published version by editor and dialogue-scribe Stan Lee.[3]

An example of the third story-type is Kirby's early 1960s series *The X-Men*. This series deals with a secret society of mutants who use their paranormal powers to help humanity from behind the scenes. It's very possible that Kirby drew his initial inspiration for this series from one of the earliest and most successful books about occult conspiracies published at that time. By the late 1960s, this particular book had become something of a cult sensation, inspiring SF writers such as Philip José Farmer, Michael Moorcock and William Kotzwinkle. The book in question is *The Morning of the Magicians* by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, published in France in 1960. It covers a wide variety of esoteric subjects, including Hitler's obsession with the occult, vanished civilisations, fortean phenomena, covert psychokinetic research, secret societies, the invention of the atom bomb, and so on. This literary cabinet of wonders would be plundered by any number of lesser writers as "New Age" topics grew in popularity with the advent of the psychedelic age. But the Summer of Love was still many years away in September of 1963 when Lee and Kirby's *The X-Men* #1 hit the newsstands. The English translation of *The Morning of the Magicians* was published earlier that same year. The final chapter of the book bears the evocative title "Some Reflections On the Mutants". It's interesting to note that just as the working title of *The Eternals* reflected its source material, the original title of *The X-Men* was, according to Marvel editor Stan Lee, *The Mutants*. It was altered only at the last minute when Marvel's publisher, Martin Goodman, insisted that the average child buying comics at the local newsstand wouldn't know what the word "mutant" meant.

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ABOVE AND LEFT: The X-Men, now and then; the 2011 film and the first issue of the Marvel comic from 1963.

In the final chapter of *The Morning of the Magicians* (chapter 10, denoted by the Roman numeral "X"), the authors set forth their theories regarding the unquantifiable effect that an active secret society of mutants might bring to bear on world affairs. They wonder whether "under the influence of forces that are still mysterious, a new race of men is appearing, endowed with superior intellectual powers… Does this point to a mutation of the human species? Shall we see a new race of beings who resemble us outwardly, but yet are different? This is the formidable problem we must now examine… Einstein at the end of his life declared: 'If I had known [the effects of notoriety], I should have been a plumber.' Above Einstein's level, the mutant is clever enough to conceal himself. He keeps his discoveries for himself. He lives as discreetly as possible, and only tries to remain in contact with other intelligences like his own… Do these mutants form an invisible society?… The human society we know has shown only too well its hostility towards an objective intelligence or a free imagination: Giordano Bruno burnt, Einstein exiled, Oppenheimer kept under observation. If there are mutants answering to our description, there is every reason to believe that they are working and communicating with one another in a society superimposed on our own."[4]

If anything can be said definitively about Kirby's imagination, it's that he had the unerring ability to explore an idea to its utmost limits (and beyond) within seconds of it having taken root inside his head. Kirby biographer Mark Evanier, for example, has spoken about the evening when he watched Kirby flesh out the entire concept behind his 1970s *Demon* series during a single dinner.[5] Therefore, it's not difficult to imagine such phantasmagoric speculations as those set forth by Pauwels and Bergier being more than enough stimulus to set the gears of his almost-limitless imagination in motion.

As early as the 1940s, Kirby was already applying his interests in fringe subject matter to the comic book medium. In at least one instance, this led to some unwelcome attention from the FBI, when as a result of reading "an obscure magazine" that contained an article about experiments allegedly being performed by Nikola Telsa at that time, Kirby created a comic book story based around Tesla's research. He was contacted by FBI agents who demanded in a rather forcible manner that he reveal how he had gotten access to "Top Secret" information.

It's impossible to know what Kirby had been reading, but the main point is that the magazine was obscure enough to be discussing Tesla's research at a time when the previously infamous scientist had almost fallen off the map of popular consciousness. Clearly, then, Kirby was hunting down esoteric information even then, no doubt as inspiration for his comic book stories as well as for his own personal illumination.

Of course, I have no idea if Kirby actually read *The Morning of the Magicians*, but given his documented interest in similar explorations of occult conspiracies and the paranormal, and given the fact that the English publication of the book coincides with Kirby developing *The X-Men*, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that Pauwels and Bergier may have served as the original springboard for one of Kirby's most famous creations.

Despite the fact that he could often give the impression in interviews of being a practical, down-to-earth realist, Kirby was at heart a seeker after truth. His editors and publishers expected nothing more from him than the creation of crowd-pleasing yarns delivered on schedule, but Kirby expected something far greater from himself and his audience. What he wanted most was a platform from which to pass along covert messages of transcendence to an audience in desperate need of more than just entertainment. His personal fascination with the occult and the paranormal no doubt helped him accomplish this goal, providing depth and dimension to what in lesser hands would have been nothing more than genre adventure stories for mass consumption. FT

NOTES

1 Interview with J Michael Straczynski on the Los Angeles radio show *Hour 25*.

2 Jack Kirby: *Captain America and The Falcon: Madbomb*, Marvel Comics, New York, 2004, p139.

3 Mike Garland: "A Failure To Communicate: Part Four", *The Jack Kirby Collector* 24, April 1999, pp12–17.

4 Jacques Bergier & Louis Pauwels: *The Morning of the Magicians*, Avon, New York, 1963, pp399–411. Published as *The Dawn of Magic* in UK.

5 Mark Evanier: Introduction, *Jack Kirby's OMAC: One Man Army Corps*, DC Comics, New York, 2008, p4.

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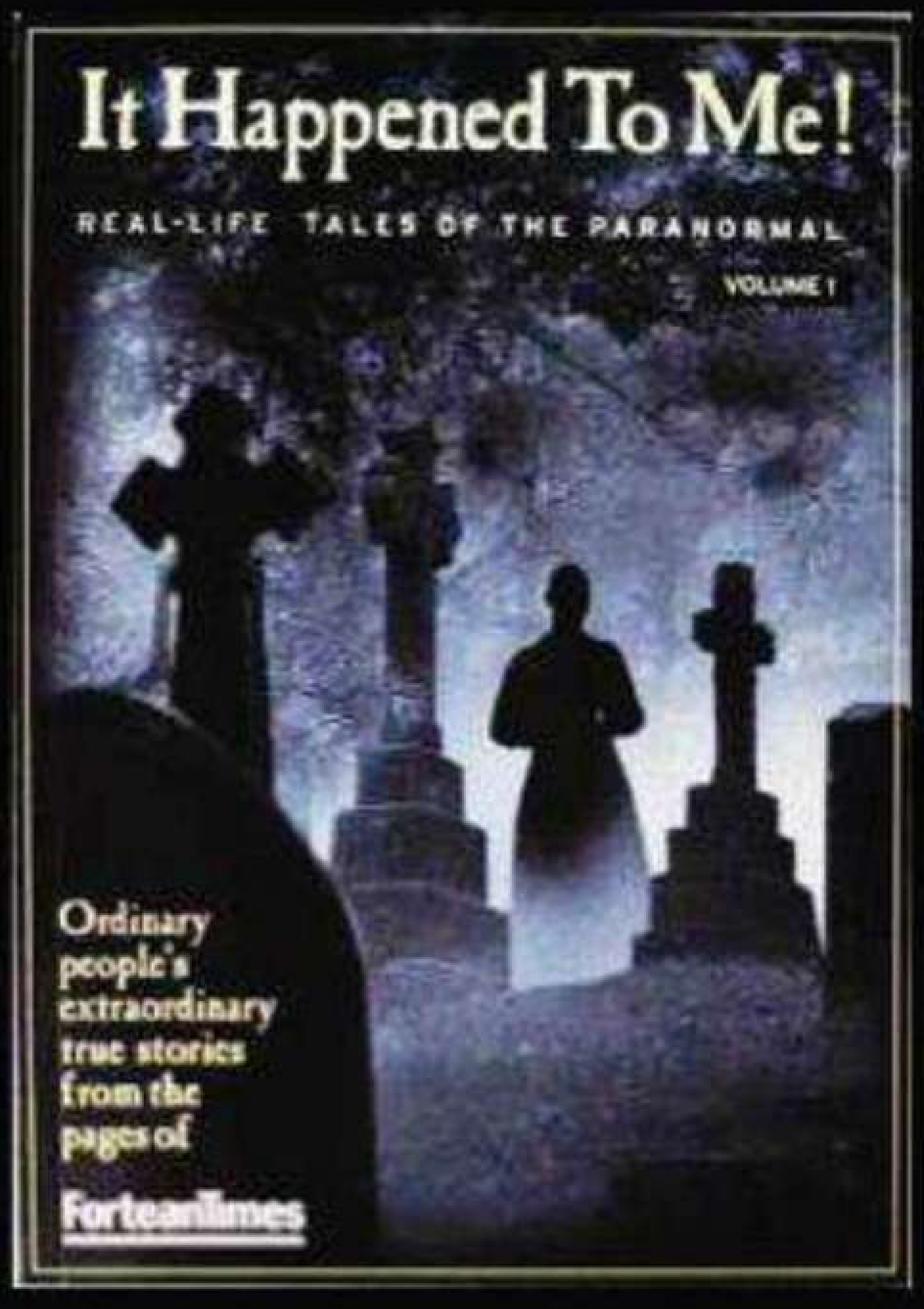
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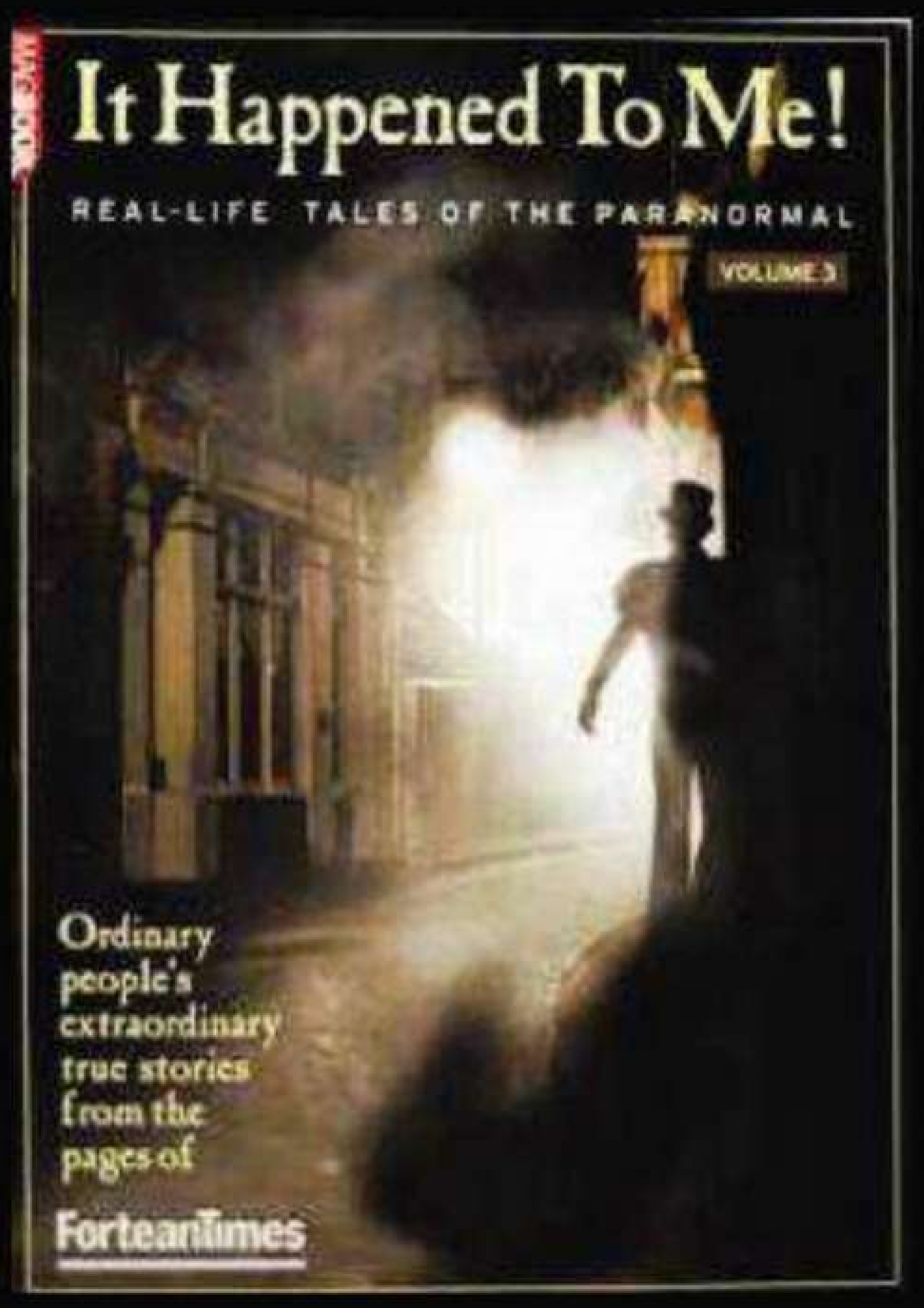
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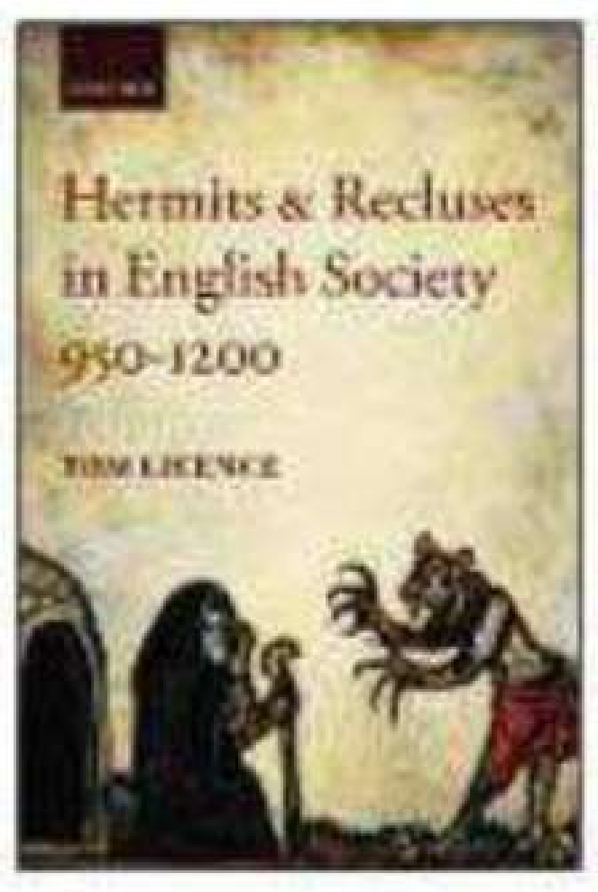
reviews

Two hundred years of solitude

Rather than being the immured ascetics of popular myth, anchorites are revealed as powerful intermediaries between this world and the next in this exemplary study



Hermits & Recluses in English Society 950–1200

Tom Licence

Oxford University Press 2011
Hb, 288pp, notes, refs, ind, £55.00, ISBN 9780199592364
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £49.50

In his anticlerical work *The Devil a Monk Would Be: A Survey of Sex & Celibacy in Religion* (1942, re-issued 2003), T Clifton Longworth included a chapter entitled 'Some English Hermitages and their Story'. Drawing attention to the many legends of walled-up monks and nuns, he observed: "Very little research has so far been devoted to this fascinating topic" and expressed hopes that a detailed study would one day be undertaken of those he considered hapless victims of religious oppression.

Hermits & Recluses in English Society 950–1200, by Dr Tom Licence, more than fulfils this hope, but in the process expunges the woeful misconceptions and popular myths Longworth perpetuated. Dispensing with legend and prejudice, Licence embarks upon a penetrating examination of the lives of hermits and recluses (known collectively as anchorites) and the social forces that caused them to proliferate in 12th-century England. Anchorites became so numerous that they were an "omnipresent" feature of the mediæval landscape.

While Longworth portrayed anchorites as victims, Licence presents them as powerful figures providing 12th-century life and culture with an essential reference point. Hermits' extreme rejection of materialism was seen as the path to spiritual salvation. They were perceived as living the optimal religious life, with the most exemplary revered as saints. They represented "the type of imagined persona by which society gave form and substance to notions of virtue, holiness and renunciation." Everyone from royalty to peasants sought them out for guidance, but they were more than gurus. Hermits represented a bridge between the world and eternity, acting as guardians against legions of demons swarming at the perilous margins of human settlements.

Hermits prepared themselves for eternity by disciplining their minds and bodies. Extreme self-denial and flagellation, perceived as punishments or acts of penitence, were considered necessary to quash physical and mental desires so communion with Heaven could occur. While hermits retained relative freedom of movement, recluses imposed even greater restrictions upon themselves, voluntarily entering tiny cells within which they stayed for life. When fire or marauders threatened, they remained unmoved, accepting physical death as a form of martyrdom. There was no shortage of volunteers, particularly on the part of women. Some cells were in towers, but many were wooden shacks annexed to churches. Some were built on cemeteries so the occupant could pray ceaselessly for the souls of the dead.

Reading of the acts of self-denial which might extend over decades, it is amazing that many anchorites survived as long as they did; many more succumbed. One is reminded of the holy men of India and Tibet who mortify themselves, and the practices of indigenous shamans who undergo privations of the flesh before developing visionary abilities. Unsurprisingly, boredom afflicted hermits and some died of it. Many hermits read and wrote extensively; some went fishing or founded religious communities with the followers they attracted.

Many and varied were the reasons why an individual adopted this arduous life. For some it was as a result of a conversion experience or a vision, for others a protest against society and in the cases of women as a conscious choice to escape a decreed role, such as avoiding a forced marriage. Others simply did not fit in elsewhere. The author also explores the impact of the Norman conquest, the rise of monasticism, moves towards a market economy, and changing attitudes to spirituality and the perceived status of the individual human in the mediæval Cosmos.

Ultimately, the extreme privations to which hermits subjected themselves were questioned, and a more gentle approach to existence gained currency. It was realised that living life could present just as many spiritual challenges as retreating from it, with the route to salvation lying in actions amid society in the present rather than isolated preparation for the hereafter.

> **"Hermits acted as guardians against demons swarming at the margins of human settlement"**

This excellent book is primarily an academic text for mediæval scholars. It may prove a challenge for a casual reader, but apply just a scintilla of the concentration of a hermit and you will prevail!

I found myself wondering what lessons hermits hold for our society. An easy comparison might be with the hippies of the 1960s, the free economy movement today and vegans such as the recent author of *The Moneyless Man*. But a more telling parallel at the opposite end of our social spectrum is suggested implicitly at one point in this book, where the author calls hermits the bankers of the spiritual capital of their age.

Has not our own obsessively materialistic culture produced financiers and lawyers who, like hermits, spend the bulk of their lives shut away in offices of brick and concrete, foregoing ordinary pleasures? Today's monied hermits commune via electronic altars with the abstract and impersonal forces of international capital. Like hermits of old, they too often succumb prematurely to diseases linked to their lifestyles. Our financial hermit class meet every failure with exhortations for yet more economic effort and sacrifice by the community, with the promised future rewards remaining elusive and illusory.

Alan Murdie

Fortean Times Verdict

ACADEMIC BUT FASCINATING LOOK AT EXTREME PRIVATION **9**

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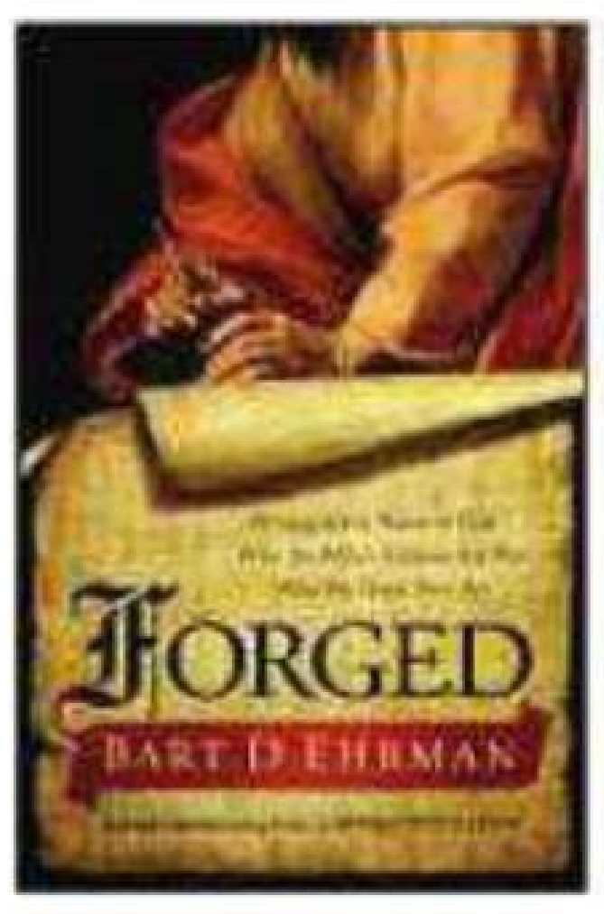

Forged

Writing in the Name of God

Bart D Ehrman

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Hb, 307pp, notes, ind, £19.99, ISBN 9780062012616
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.99

I guess that forteans who give any thought to the subject of the Gospels, divide into those who believe there is no historical evidence for Jesus; and those who believe that He was a real character whose history differs from the Gospel account. I fall into the former category, but that doesn't dampen my fascination with scripture and the debates it engenders. Christianity is still the dominant religion, and thus the dominant grand narrative (whatever jaded post-modernists claim); that in itself makes the problem of Gospel authenticity important.

Bart Ehrman's work constitutes a telling contribution to the Jesus debate; moreover, he has the knack of getting as much useful evidence into his popular books as he demonstrates in his more scholarly treatises. *Forged* is an overview of authorial authenticity in the New Testament; as for its point of view, the more perspicuous readers will have gleaned a clue from the title.

The New Testament is a small collection of short books. Four deal with the life and works of Jesus, and one with the period immediately after his death. The rest are 'secondary' literature; letters ('epistles') to churches, and an apocalypse (a 'revelation', a popular form of literature in the period around the formation of Christianity).

How many of these books are what they claim to be? Are there forgeries in the New Testament? Ehrman thinks so, and he has evidence to back up his claims.

First, though, he deals with the question of forgery itself: is it reasonable to use this term in the context of Scripture? Ehrman's justification is that forgery was a well-known practice in the ancient world and, more to the point, that it was always regarded as a dishonest practice. This disposes of those woolly vindications of 'pseudepigraphy' which litter less rigorous biblical scholarship.

His detailed treatment of specific books (particularly his interrogation of Paul's epistles, and the book of Acts) is exemplary. At the same time, he is respectful of his subject matter; he never ridicules the writing under investigation, even when clearly demonstrating that it is completely inauthentic. This sympathy may well stem from his own religious experiences, which he writes about in the introduction.

One thing puzzles me about Ehrman. He obviously believes that Jesus was a real person. At one point, he claims that there is good historical evidence for the existence of Jesus. Elsewhere in the book, whenever he makes a bold statement, he backs it up with examples to prove his point. But when it comes to this central question, he omits any examples of the good historical evidence he claims is there.

Forged is written for a US (and Christian) audience. Non-Americans may occasionally wince at its friendliness, and readers with a working knowledge of the subject may feel they are sometimes being spoon-fed. But these minor irritations don't spoil a well-constructed book.

Noel Rooney

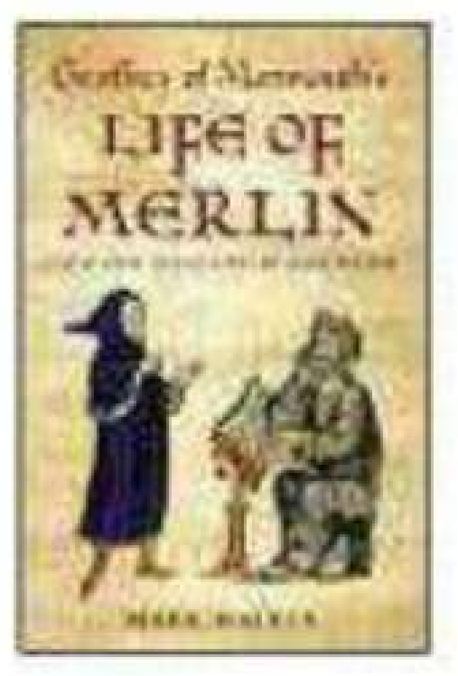
Fortean Times Verdict
RIGOROUS BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE GENERAL READER **8**

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Life of Merlin

A New Verse Translation

Mark Walker

Amberley Publishing 2011
Pb, 128pp, bib, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781445601786
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



Vita Merlini is a Latin hexameter poem postluding Geoffrey's earlier 'Prophecies of Merlin' in his *History of the Kings of Britain*. It establishes 'Merlin', transmuted from Welsh 'Myrddin', though not as the familiar Arthurian wizard, nor as a mediæval Harry Potter.

Merlin here is depressive, at times mad, craving the hermit life, fluctuating between woods and court, a skilled astronomer but reluctant wonderworker. Walker appositely quotes Arthur C Clarke's Fort-like dictum: "Any sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic."

The poem ranges from battle scenes to erotic intrigues to discourses on strange phenomena involving birds, fish and islands, springs and lakes. These verses will most interest *FT* readers. Walker sees a combination of autopsy (equating Merlin and author) and such sources as Isidore of Seville, now patron saint of the Internet. Classical possibilities include Pliny's *Natural History*.

It is a pity that Walker excludes the Latin text (JJ Parry's 1925 bilingual edition is online), which would have facilitated discussion of the poem's classical allusions and sometimes clever variations: Ovidian influences are observed, Virgilian and others not.

Not everyone accepts Geoffrey's authorship; JSP Tatlock's *Speculum* 18 is not in Walker's bibliography. It does, though, include RJ Stewart's books, which link Merlin to 2012 prophecies based on the Mayan calendar. Walker's English hexameter version (the first) and erudite commentary are a valuable contribution to understanding Geoffrey and his world.

Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict
ECCE ITERUM WALKERUS ET EST MIHI SAEPE VOCANDUS **9**

Casa Pia

The Making of a Modern European Witch Hunt

Richard Webster

The Orwell Press 2011
Pb, 105pp, £7.95, ISBN 9780951592281
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.95

Webster's analysis of the British children's home pædophile panic of the 1980s and 90s, *The Secret of Bryn Estyn* (reviewed in **FT208**), is one of the great solo investigations. Webster showed that the entire series of episodes, the result of a nation-wide 'trawling' by the police for pædophile networks preying on the residents of children's homes, was a fantasy, the result of bad journalism, officials afraid of being blamed for ignoring a scandal, and lies told by some of the children who were motivated by the police promise of large compensation for any abuse. Webster dismantles the whole thing and concludes that over 100 wrongful convictions ensued.

This much smaller book (*Bryn Estyn* was 750 pages; this is 105) describes a similar outbreak, again in a group of municipal children's homes, Casa Pia, this time in Portugal. But while in the British witch hunt – despite the many court cases – the tales of children being abused by the Great and the Good never got beyond rumour, in Portugal a group of public figures – politicians and Portugal's best-known television personality among them – were accused and eventually tried and convicted in 2010. It is as if Ken Livingstone and Terry Wogan (among others) were found guilty of being part of a homosexual pædophile ring in Bernardo's homes in London.

Once again Webster shows that the evidence is false, the result of the same elements which caused the British version: amplification and invention by the media; the fear and incompetence of politicians, social workers and the prosecuting authorities; and the lies of some children (and one politician). The fact that the major witness and some of the children have recanted since the verdicts has not yet overcome the profound embarrassment of a huge section of Portugal's civil society at being swept along in the holy hunt for today's witches.

Much of forteana takes place in the intersection of human perception, psychological need and religious belief, where answering the question "What is going on here?" becomes more interesting as it gets more difficult; and little is currently more difficult to deal with than allegations of pædophilia. Webster shows that it is still possible to navigate through this foggy, booby-trapped interior landscape; but he also shows how difficult the journey becomes once the mob begins to gather.

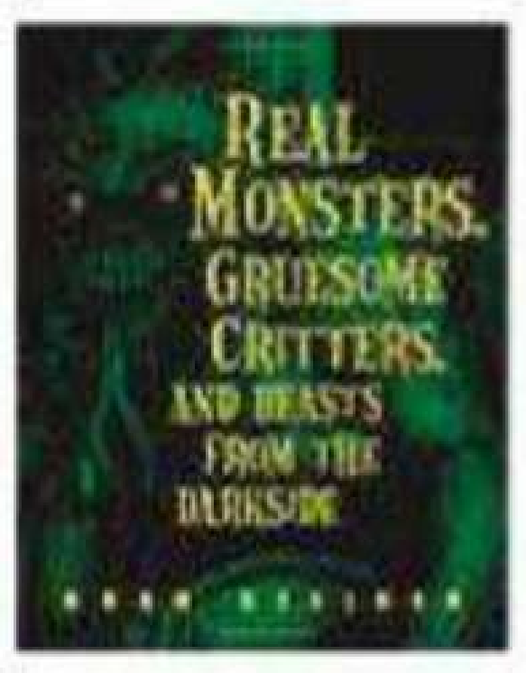
Robin Ramsay

Fortean Times Verdict
A TERRIFYING DEMONSTRATION OF THE POWER OF THE MOB 9

Real Monsters, Gruesome Critters, and Beasts from the Dark Side

Brad Steiger

Visible Ink Press 2011
Pb, 398pp, illus, bib, ind, $19.95/£16.99, ISBN 9781578592203
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29



Brad Steiger is a prolific writer on unexplained phenomena. His work has been geared toward non-critical readers, but he's always been thoughtful and cautious – until now. This volume would be better entitled "My First Big Book of Monsters". It could be a children's survey, except that it frequently veers from introductory material to crackpot theories, all presented as "unbelievable yet true".

Snippets from Steiger and more than a dozen contributors are collected under thrilling headings such as "Bigfoot – North America's King Kong". Also included are werewolves, vampires, ghosts, lake monsters, aliens/ancient astronauts and the Deros, the evil robot denizens of inner-Earth made famous in 1940s pulp magazines as *The Shaver Mystery*.

Given so many chefs in Steiger's kitchen, the quality is wildly varied. The old standards are here, including Betty and Barney Hill, the Dædalus sea serpent and the Patterson-Gimlin Sasquatch film, and there are also some genuine new finds, such as 1930s native Inuit reports of Bigfoot in Alaska. Too often, though, Steiger is sensational and plain wrong. There's little effort to weigh or analyse. Speaking of US National Guards and shape-shifting Tibetan demons from another dimension, Steiger breathlessly asks: "Could our guardsmen from New York have come face to face with such a being?" Umm… maybe? Or, later, embracing early, naïve archæological excavations: "Could these huge skeletons of gigantic 'Indians' be all that remains of a proud prehistoric race?" Well, no. Mammoth and mastodons remains were often mistaken for those of "giants" in the 19th century.

That's all harmless fun, I suppose, but Steiger's grasp of evolution is alarming. The orang-pendek, for example, could be a "newly evolved species of ape". As opposed to a previously-evolved species?

It gets worse. Discussing inhabitants of the inner Earth, one of his correspondents alleges "birth defects and malformations exist which, doubtless" point to "the human family or gene pool being interbred" with underground beings. Steiger concludes: "Could it be [..] the worst among us are not completely *of* us"? (Emphasis in the original.) No. It could not be. A more likely excuse is shocking bigotry. Birth defects as "evidence" of inner-Earth interbreeding?

Nor, speaking of those pesky Zeta Reticulans, is there "a very strong possibility that the reptilian genetic engineers who helped program early humankind may have been the very same ones who were responsible for the great cataclysms."

Another correspondent helpfully points out that the reptilian "hive" mind-control can be fought using "sixth sense, gut instinct."

My own sixth sense, gut instinct says to avoid this book. There's some gold here, but there's also an awful lot of sensational idiocy.

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict
SOME PURE GOLD OVERWHELMED BY A LOT OF PINCHBECK 4

In olden days

The past is not necessarily another country to people who engage with it

Antiquaries and Archaists

The Past in the Past, the Past in the Present

Eds: Megan Aldrich and Robert J Wallis

Spire Books 2009
Pb, 170pp, illus, notes, £19.95/$39.95, ISBN 9781904965237
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.95

'Antiquarian' often refers to those who investigated the past before the emergence of scientific rigour in modern archæology. While there have been re-assessments of antiquarian contributions to the study of the past (ie, Stuart Piggott's 1989 *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination*), not until the 1990s do we see a reclamation of the term, most vividly by Julian Cope with *The Modern Antiquarian*.

With papers on the origins of the Church Monument Society, early Japanese archæology and the influence of formal garden design on William Stuckley, *Antiquaries and Archaists* could have been a mess of unconnected themes. Instead, it teases out shared concerns. Sarah Semple's paper on ancient monuments in early mediæval Britain looks at the appropriation of monuments in a social context, while Anne Farrer (who proposes the term 'archaist') explores the way the past is reified within the art of Chinese printmaking.

The main theme running through the volume is enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment with the past, highlighted in two papers.

Jeremy Harte's intelligent and multidisciplinary paper uses toponymy, poetry and documentary evidence to examine how early mediæval communities understood barrows and Roman remains in terms of a mythic landscape occupied by giants, elves and dragons. He explores playful language (for example, at Drakehull, near Guildford, where the yellow sand could be taken for a dragon's treasure), before looking at the disenchantment of the 16th century onwards.

Robert J Wallis charts the relationship pagan groups have with prehistory, particularly the reburial issue. Taking a lead from indigenous groups in the US and Australia, such as Honouring the Ancient Dead, British pagans have called for dialogue on excavated remains. While there are still tensions, Wallis's study showing pagan groups being acknowledged as stakeholders with a genuine interest in managing the past. This was demonstrated at the Lindow Man exhibition in Manchester, where an area was provided for people to make offerings.

Antiquaries and Archaists deals well with the complex way in which people engage with the past as a physical presence and as a concept.

Stephen Toase

Fortean Times Verdict
WIDE-RANGING AND STIMULATING COLLECTION OF ESSAYS 8

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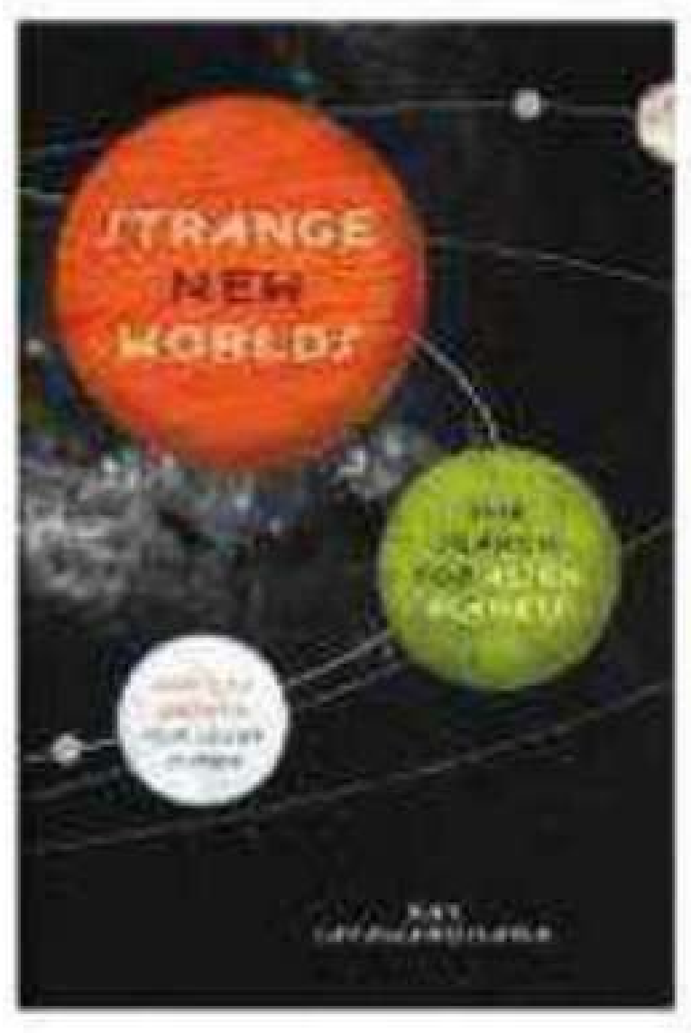
Exoplanets for tyros

A planet-hunter explains what lies beyond our Solar System, but defining life – alien or terrestrial – remains challenging



Strange New Worlds

The Search for Alien Planets and Life beyond our Solar System

Ray Jayawardhana

Princeton University Press 2011
Hb, 255pp, illus, bib, ind, £16.95/$24.95, ISBN 9780691142548
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE 15.25

In 1991, astronomers announced that they had unambiguously discovered the first planet outside the nine (poor Pluto had not then been demoted) in our solar system. The planet orbited a pulsar – a rotating, decayed star that sends out a regular beam of radiation, rather like a lighthouse sends out light. Changes in the pattern of radiation led astronomers to infer the existence of a planet of 10 times the mass of Earth orbiting the pulsar.

Four years later, astronomers revealed definitive evidence of a planet orbiting a normal star other than the Sun – but these were gas giants, rather akin to supersized Jupiters. 'Super-Earths' followed in 2005, beginning with a planet at least 7.5 times the mass of Earth orbiting the red dwarf Gliese 876, about 15 light years distant. At the time of writing, astronomers have discovered 531 exoplanets orbiting 445 stars, excluding pulsars (see http://1.usa.gov/4dFvs9 for the latest tally). It's a fascinating story, which Ray Jayawardhana, a planet hunter, Canadian professor of astronomy and science writer, tells with panache, enthusiasm and insight.

Strange New Worlds is populist and rich in anecdote. For example, the temperature difference (1400°C) between the night and day sides of upsilon Andromedæ b is "equivalent to leaping into a volcano". (Last October, scientists also reported the intriguing, and unexplained, finding that the hottest place on this 'hot Jupiter' isn't directly under the red dwarf's glare.)

Jayawardhana further enlivens his book with biographical vignettes, which help make *Strange New Worlds* accessible for the 'general' reader. For example, William Huggins's spectroscopic studies showed that nebulæ and galaxies – then often little more than fuzzy smears seen through telescopes – consisted of gas and stars respectively. Huggins wasn't a professional astronomer: he was a retired Victorian silk merchant inspired by a lecturing scientist. Amateurs continue to make important contributions to astronomy and it would be an apposite tribute to this excellent book if Jayawardhana inspires others to continue the tradition.

Jayawardhana covers too much ground to review extensively the evidence supporting each comment. Nevertheless, on a few occasions, I felt the 'average' reader would have benefited from more discussion and greater detail. For example, in the early 1960s, 'wobbles' in Bernard's star led some astronomers to infer the presence of a planet with 1.6 times the mass of Jupiter. Arguments raged, Jayawardhana notes, as to whether the wobble arose from "spurious effects" in the telescope or variations in the photographic plate and by the mid-1980s most astronomers "had given up on the planet's existence". But why did the argument persist for years? A discussion could exemplify the problems facing scientists when deciding whether a finding is an observational artefact, an issue the 'general' public should bear in mind – technological improvements notwithstanding – when reading about astronomical and other scientific advances in the popular media today.

Similarly, Jayawardhana comments that "some would say that astrobiology had a dubious debut" when researchers announced that the now iconic Martian meteorite ALH84001 "contained fossils and other evidence of nanobacteria – a claim now disputed by many scientists". A few more paragraphs discussion would help readers appreciate why "many scientists" dispute the claim – especially as ALH84001 captured headlines around the world and popular documentaries and features still refer to the meteorite. Readers could benefit from a more detailed discussion about what would constitute a signal of alien life, especially as scientists can't agree on how to define life on Earth. (I addressed this issue – arguably the most vexed in biology in 2008 – in a feature for a European Molecular Biological Organisation journal: http://bit.ly/l32ITw). Jayawardhana's a clear and insightful writer – so there's no risk that a more detailed discussion would have lost a 'general' reader or they'd become bogged down in the detail.

Despite these minor – and that's what they are – caveats, we should applaud and welcome Jayawardhana's ability to bring the often esoteric realm of exoplanet astronomy within the grasp of the average Discovery Channel viewer. *Strange New Worlds* reminded me of an article in *New Scientist* or a 'quality' paper: a readable introduction to one of the most provocative and thought-provoking areas in science that requires no background in either astronomy or science more generally. Very highly recommended.

Mark Greener

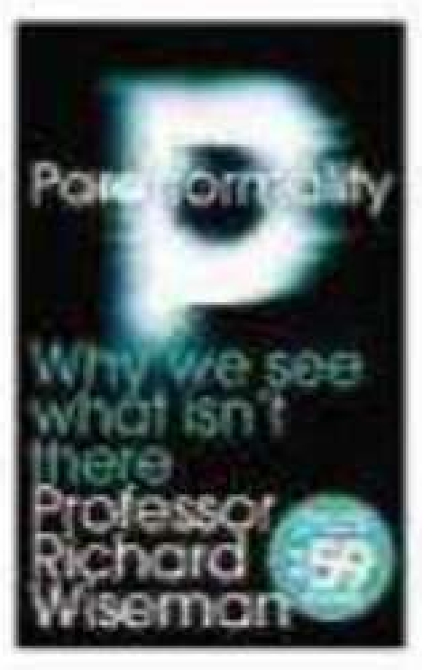
Fortean Times Verdict
AN OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD INTRODUCTION TO EXOPLANETS **9**

Paranormality

Why We See What Isn't There

Richard Wiseman

Pan Macmillan 2011
Pb, 340pp, illus, £12.99, ISBN 9780230752986
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69



Richard Wiseman produces books at a prodigious rate. He's done an evidence-based self-help guide, and looked at luck and the quirky side of life, but his main interests are magic, illusions and parapsychology.

In *Paranormality*, Wiseman explores how everyday reality creates the illusory experiences we often attribute to the paranormal. He has a conversational tone and deftly combines anecdote with solidly referenced research data.

Wiseman is sceptical about the paranormal, but he's in a different league to your usual sceptic. He carefully explains how the appearance of paranormality is produced in the phenomena he is examining, and does so based on his own research, be it into ghosts, prophecy, fortune-telling or mind-control. Usefully, the book contains QR codes the techies amongst you can scan using a smartphone to take you to supporting material.

Wisely, he concentrates on phenomena, or aspects of phenomena, where human involvement is crucial, as these are most amenable to systematic examination and understanding. Wiseman makes convincing cases for the lack of paranormality in most of them.

This is scepticism done right. Where phenomena have prosaic explanations, it needs to be said. There's no point in mystifying things needlessly. He does not comment on phenomena which are unlikely to yield to the kind of research he's equipped to carry out.

This sits in stark contrast to the average ill-informed sceptical vilification we routinely see. We need more serious investigation like Wiseman's, and less armchair sneering.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict
DEBUNKING DONE WITH PANACHE – SCEPTICISM AS IT SHOULD BE **8**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

MONSTERS OF NEW JERSEY

Loren Coleman & Bruce Hallenbeck

Stackpole Books (stackpolebooks.com) 2010.
Pb, pp110, £10.99
ISBN 9780811735964

The most famous monster of New Jersey is, of course, the Jersey Devil, which lends its name to the state's National Hockey League team. Naturally, it gets a whole chapter to itself in this tight and eminently readable study by two of cryptozoology's veteran big-hitters. Other chapters focus on specific types of mysterious creature sightings within the state: winged things; giants; urban mysteries such as the 'monkey-man' that haunted Hoboken; the sea-serpent sightings off Cape May in the 1880s which lead a pod of other marine reports; lakes and rivers in the state with their own strange denizens; and finally the 'lizardmen' and their reptilian relations. This is followed by a 31-page chronological listing of the strongest sightings in the state, from 1735 to 2009. I'd like to have known more about the ambling giant stalk of broccoli, but the chief witness was alone at the time and "severely intoxicated".

THE MYTH OF THE GREAT ENDING

Joseph M Felser

Hampton Roads Publishing (hrpub.com) 2011
Pb, pp265, index, bib, £16.99
ISBN 9781571746450

With so many prophecies about the End of the World – and we have just survived Harold Camping's 21 May 2011 prediction (pp26–27) – they have become a form of self-parody. Now comes a serious study by a professor of philosophy at City University, New York, who has been concerned enough about the promulgation of uncritical apocalyptomania among the credulous that he felt impelled to write this book. After reviewing the long and depressing history of the subject, he digs for the source of our willingness to believe. It's a fascinating tale well told, with lots of insightful moments. In the end, Felser thinks the recurring nature of the 'Myth of the Great Ending' might be a form of collective conscience (an unconscience?) concerning the degree to which the human collective is out of balance with Nature, in both the psychological and ecological senses. Dreams, intuitions, visions and other parapsychological phenomena could actually be trying to tell us something. Well worth a read.

PARANORMAL LONDON

Neil Arnold

History Press (thehistorypress.co.uk) 2010
Pb, pp95, bib, illus, £9.99
ISBN 9780752455914

Neil Arnold has long been an avid investigator of London's abundant mysteries. If you're looking for a quick and informative run through his collection, here are tantalising pointers to places (including some underground or overhead) where mermaids, fairies, dragons, giants, aliens, UFOs, and big cats have been encountered. Prominent are locations associated with Spring-heeled Jack and the Vampire of Highgate cemetery. Another curiosity in this slender book is the foreword by the enigmatic David Farrant, who uses it to declare that he was wrongly accused, in 1971, of vandalising tombs in Highgate cemetery.

THE JACOBITES AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Geoff Holder

Amberley Publishing (amberley-books.com) 2010
Pb, pp128, index, bib, illus, £12.99
ISBN 9781848685888

Holder has written a number of guides to regional folklore and legends, but this new book takes a novel tack, focusing on the ill-fated Jacobite risings of the late 17th to mid-18th centuries. Here are tales of witchcraft, spirits, prophecies, prodigies, portents and curses that followed Bonnie Price Charlie and supporters of the Stuart cause. Of course, there are battlefields, castles and dwellings (a surprising number of them in England) with ghosts, poltergeists, fairies and grisly murders – but there is quite a bit of human interest too. For example: the dashing young John 'Bonnie Dundee' Graham who was reputed to have sold his soul to the Devil and died by a silver bullet, and the Young Pretender himself was said to have "impressed" his good looks upon an unborn child. Here too, we learn how the 'touching rite' (believed by many at the time to be a sure cure for scrofula) was introduced to British royalty and used politically by the Stuarts as a proof of a legitimate king, and how many of the marvels of superstition, witchcraft and folklore were exploited by propagandists on all sides. Great stuff, well written and illustrated.

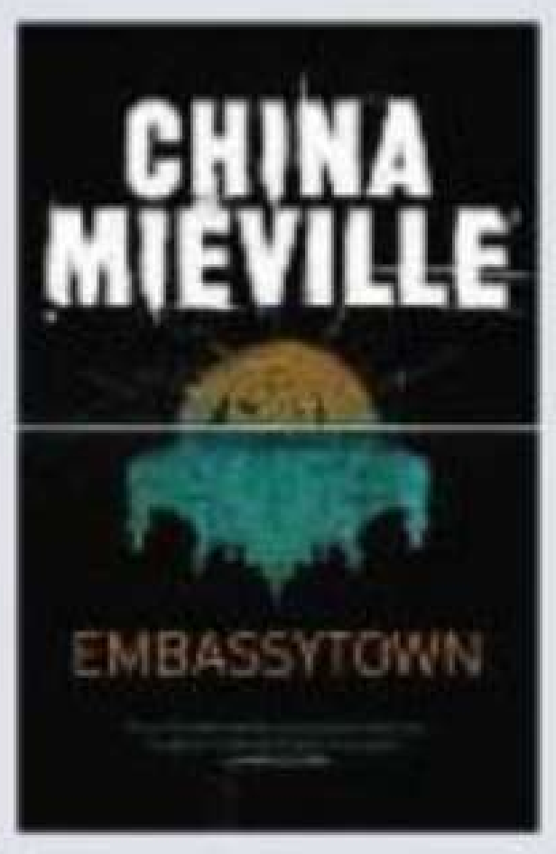
BEER AND SPIRITS

David Taylor & Andrew Homer

Amberley Publishing (amberley-books.com) 2010
Pb, pp96, bib, illus, £12.99
ISBN 9781848682665

Pubs have been around in Britain since Roman times, apparently, and this is a fine sampling of haunted pubs of the Black Country, the region of the West Midlands that became the heart of England's industrial revolution. Arranged as an illustrated gazetteer, this small but excellent sampling enriches our knowledge of relatively unknown lore and demonstrates its survival into modern times. It's the sort of enterprise small local presses do so well, and in which they deserve to be supported.

FORTEAN FICTION



Embassytown

China Miéville

MacMillan, 2011
Hb, pp432, £17.99
ISBN 978-0230750760

Rebellious Avice lives in Embassytown, a bubble of humans on a world belonging to alien Hosts whose most remarkable feature is their Language: they cannot lie. When an Embassytown Ambassador introduces discord into Language, it looks like apocalypse for planet Arieka unless our heroine can come up with a plan.

China Miéville is a masterful creator of worlds, and the baroque weirdness of Arieka – biorigged machines, robot tramps, tentacled aliens – leaves enough room for the reader's own imagination to be realised. But it is for his use of SF to carry big, clever and frequently political ideas that he has become the darling of mainstream critics. In *Embassytown*, his focus is on language, on the gap between signifier and signified, on the power that comes with command of the dominant discourse, on words' capacity to move and affect. It's a self-reflexive preoccupation: the fantastical lands described by an SF writer can seem unreal, and yet his underlying message can have a profound truth.

Miéville has a lot of fun with his set-up, introducing Festivals of Lies, humans used by Hosts as similes and recordings of Language doled out as a drug; because plot and theory are so closely intertwined, though, the constant emphasis can get a bit wearing. The ideas and setting are also more exciting than any emotional content: our protagonist is an off-the-peg, ballsy SF heroine whose only character arc is to become more ballsy, while other characters and relationships fade in and out over the course of the book. Still, this is breathtakingly original, smart and imaginative storytelling. Miéville looks set to be SF's poster boy for some time to come.

Jen Ogilvie

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS AND GAMES TO:
THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

Woochi the Demon Slayer

Dir Choi Dong-hoon, South Korea 2009

CineAsia £17.99/£24.99

Woochi the Demon Slayer, apparently based on a Korean folktale, is billed as the first great Korean superhero movie; the blurb reads: "A rascal wizard travels in time and returns to save the world!"

Woochi is a young, undisciplined wizard who can't be bothered studying Taoism. Three Taoist gods, as dopey as the Three Stooges, trap him in a painting for 500 years, until his return in the present day. The plot, so far as there is one, is that Woochi is searching for a sacred pipe for some reason; he has a sidekick, Chorangyi, a dog in human form, and he's opposed by an evil wizard called Hwadam and three shape-shifting goblin demons. There's a lot of magical, superhero fighting. And that's about it.

The first third of the film, set in 1509, is basically the prologue; it contains far too much exposition, not made any easier by all of it being in subtitles rather than dubbed. At two-and-a-quarter hours the film is far, far too long; cutting the prologue from 45 to 10 minutes would have helped.

The cuts between scenes are often so abrupt they confuse the already confusing story even more and add to the jerky quality of the whole thing. The switching between live action and CGI is sometimes obvious, and some of the wire work is ridiculously unrealistic. Okay, it's a light fantasy, but the effect is to make the film feel like a comic strip. with actors leaping from frame to frame.

Some of the English sub-titles are laughable, and many of them seem to have been translated by Google or Babel Fish: "What happens if the Archgod blows the Pipe? Why, the world will be healed! Goblins will fall to hell, and the mighty Archgod will rise once again. And we can finally return to the heavens. But after a moment, you will wait for ages."

There are a lot of set-piece scenes, from over-long wire fights to over-long Keystone Cops car chases, much of it – it's those Stooges again – coming over as slapstick.

There are inevitably echoes of popular superhero TV series: Woochi is often like *Heroes*'s Hiro at his most smugly irritating, and one scene is a direct copy of Peter and Nathan Petrelli flying off a rooftop; while the (many) fight scenes are reminiscent of *Xena/Hercules* without the credibility.

If this film were marketed as a spoof, there would be some excuse, but the extras (a full second DVD) show clearly that's not how the director and cast view it. The three hours of extras (the Blu-ray has four) are uninspiring. The "making of" documentary is simply endless shots of rehearsals for and repeated takes of wire work and other stunts; and in one interview after another actors and crew say, how much they enjoyed working on the film and how much they hope we will enjoy it too.

Chorangyi is the one spot-on idea in the whole film: as a sidekick he's so utterly faithful and bumblingly enthusiastic that you expect him to jump up at Woochi and lick his face. And some of the wire work really is cool. And somehow, despite the clichés, and if you give up trying to follow the story and just enjoy the action, the film becomes strangely compelling by the end. It's all very silly, but it really is so bad it's almost good.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

POSSIBLY A TREAT FOR KOREAN SUPERHERO DEVOTEES **5**

Seconds Apart

Dir Antonio Negret, US 2011

After Dark Originals, £15.99/£19.99

Proof, if it were ever needed, that low budget needn't mean a paucity of ideas or invention, *Seconds Apart* is an engrossing chiller about murderous identical twins. Befitting its subject matter, the production creates a series of bleached-out, symmetrical tableaux making it, paradoxically, both old-fashioned and vaguely futuristic.

Orlando and Edmund Entin are superb as Seth and Jonah, who mix telepathy and an unhealthy dollop of voyeurism to film their elaborate murders à la *Peeping Tom*. Detective Lampkin is the embittered, hard-drinking cop on their case, and it's a credit to Orlando Jones (*Magnolia/Evolution*) that he builds a credible and sympathetic performance from such a broadly drawn and wholly unoriginal character. Throw in pretty love interest Eve (Samantha Droke; think a cooler Britney), first seen munching an apple (OK, the religious imagery is a little simplistic) and you have a very attractive and wholly enjoyable addition to the After Dark Originals canon.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict

THESE TWINS ARE EVEN SCARIER THAN JEDWARD **7**

The Halfway House

Dir Basil Dearden, UK 1944

Optimum Classic, £15.99/

A rare, if mild, excursion into the supernatural for Ealing Studios makes this 1944 morale-booster an intriguing and enjoyable prospect, especially if you're not expecting another *Dead of Night*. Like that film, it gathers together a disparate group of characters, each with 'issues' dramatising some aspect of British life during wartime, from marital breakdowns and black marketeering to Ireland's relations with Nazi Germany. Thrown together in an idyllic Welsh inn where time seems to have stood still for a whole year, the guests soon realise that all is not what it seems: especially when the publican has a habit of fading in and out of the room and his barmaid daughter casts no shadow. The 'twist' is obvious from the outset, the propaganda in your face, but with a great cast including Mervyn Johns and scrumptious daughter Glynis, veteran Aldwych farceur Tom Walls and rent-a-cad Guy Middleton, not to mention a light directorial touch from the reliable Basil Dearden, this is a lesser-known Ealing gem.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
AMIABLE EALING ODDITY POSSESSES CURIOSITY VALUE **6**

Eyeborgs

Dir Richard Clabaugh, US 2009

Momentum Pictures, £15.99

Eyeborgs is set in a near-future where security cameras have sprouted legs and scurry around keeping an eye on everyone. Worse, they're also vicious law enforcers, and as they evolve from cute little robo-cyclopses to deranged giant Transformers they acquire some serious firepower. Who's controlling them, or could they be controlling themselves? The plot doesn't always add up, and some of the dialogue is so formulaic that you start to wonder if robots might be behind the scripting as well, but the pace is fast and the violence messy, and the pairing of two contemporary fears – of a surveillance society, and of machine sentience – just about does enough to sustain interest till the credits roll.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
SOMEWHAT, ER, MECHANICAL TECHNO-THRILLER **6**

Husk

Dir Brett Simmons, US 2011

After Dark Originals, £15.99/£19.99

Written and directed by Brett Simmons, *Husk* starts with a fantastic set-up and offers some chilling and highly enjoyable horror to offset its band of uninspiring youths meeting hellish ends.

A field of nine-foot-high corn becomes an impenetrable labyrinth of horror in which the stems of space and time are tangled and knotted. A dark force lurks within, lures a group of unsuspecting teenagers into this netherworld, and sets to work. For a start, there's something wrong with the scarecrows… something about the way they stalk you through the corn and cut you to ribbons.

Simmons must have known he was onto a winner with a setting reminiscent of Steven King's *Children of the Corn*, but with added zombie scarecrows; and the success of *Lost* and *Donnie Darko* probably gave him a few ideas too. The film is well conceived and directed, but the miserable college archetypes who get sucked into the plot deserve everything they get. Can all students in America really be categorised as earnest geek, cool dude, meat-headed jock, steady-Eddy or rebellious pair of tits? Chuck in a Czech exchange student or a young tree surgeon every so often and the answer is probably, why not?

I found myself rooting for evil, eager to see these tedious characters put out of their (and my) misery. No prizes for guessing the most expendable character who'll get it first, or which bookish student eventually works out the mystery. The meathead survives for an infuriatingly long time and the Jock-Geek combo makes it the furthest. That leaves the dude and the tits to battle it out for third place.

A fate that isn't quite death is usually worse than death, and for victims and audience alike, *Husk* has a good one in store. The strange space-time anomaly is neatly reconciled with the outside world and the film concludes with one of those endings which make you slap your thigh and say "Aha!"

George Binning

Fortean Times Verdict
A COMBINE HARVESTER OF HORROR: TRULY ARABLE **7**

Fertile Ground

Dir Adam Gierasch, US 2010

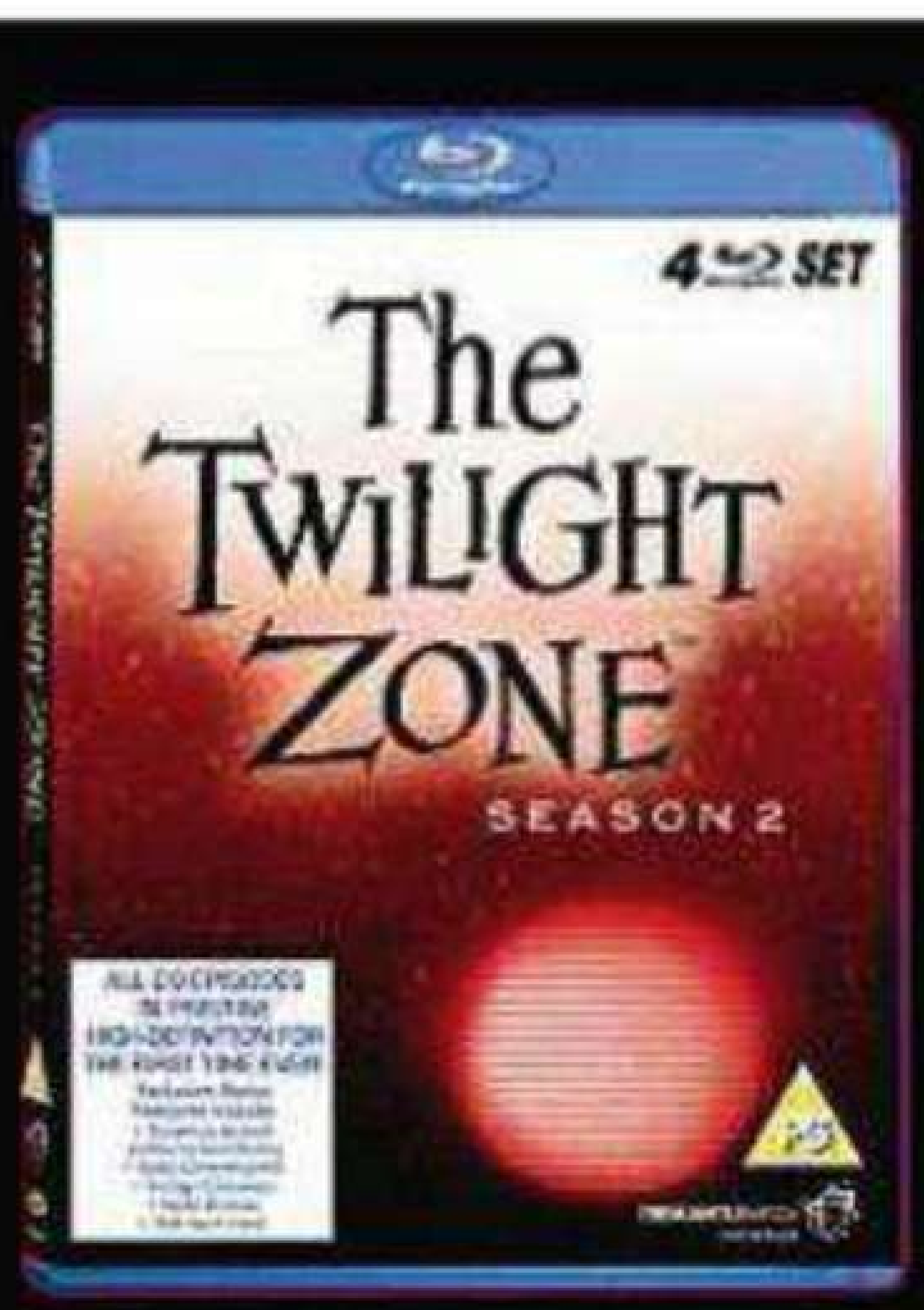
After Dark Originals, £15.99/£19.99

Given director Adam Gierasch's pedigree (*Mortuary*, 2005; *Autopsy*, 2008), *Fertile Ground* is a surprisingly traditional haunted house yarn. Pictures jump off walls, babies cry, bulbs blow, spooky handprints appear and skulls are found to be blocking the drains. This house has a history of homicide, but as to why, we're never told.

Anyone who's ever seen *Amityville Horror* or *The Shining* will find this derivative and unsatisfying. Although slow-moving, it's smartly directed and acted, featuring a veritable who's-who of US television, and viewers will delight in spotting their favourites from *Desperate Housewives*, *CSI*, *30 Rock* and *Mad Men* amongst many others.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
SO-SO HORROR REPLETE WITH AMERICAN TV STARS **5**



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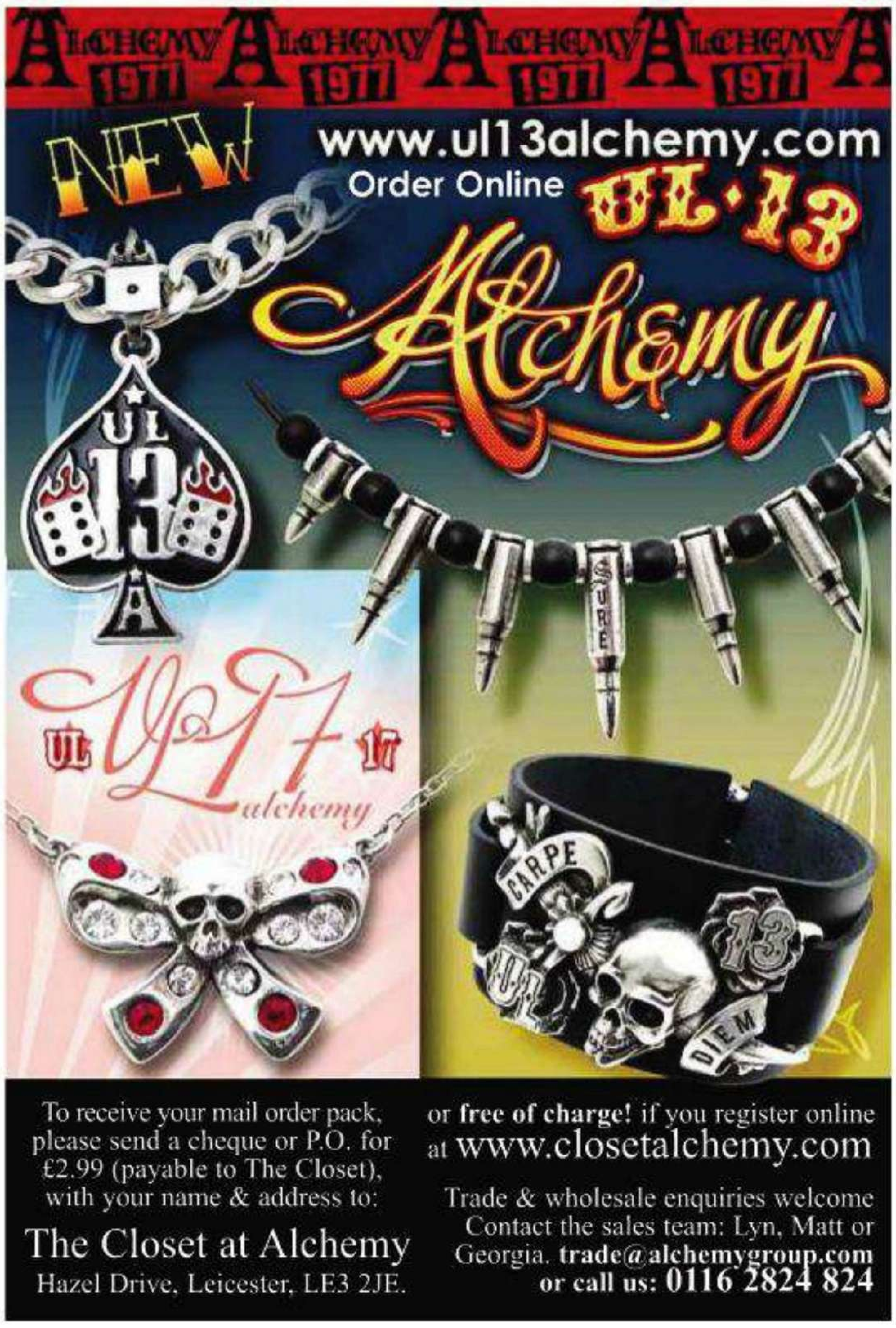
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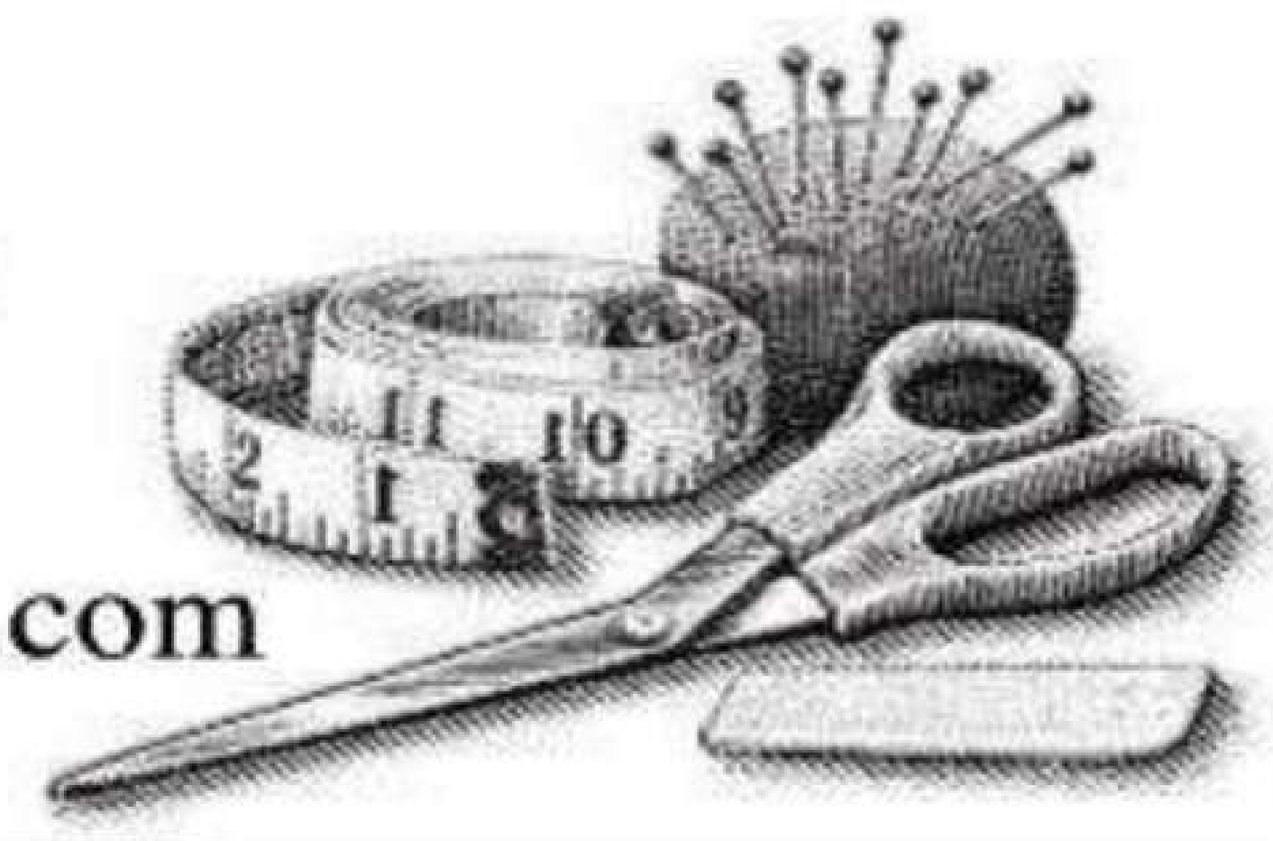

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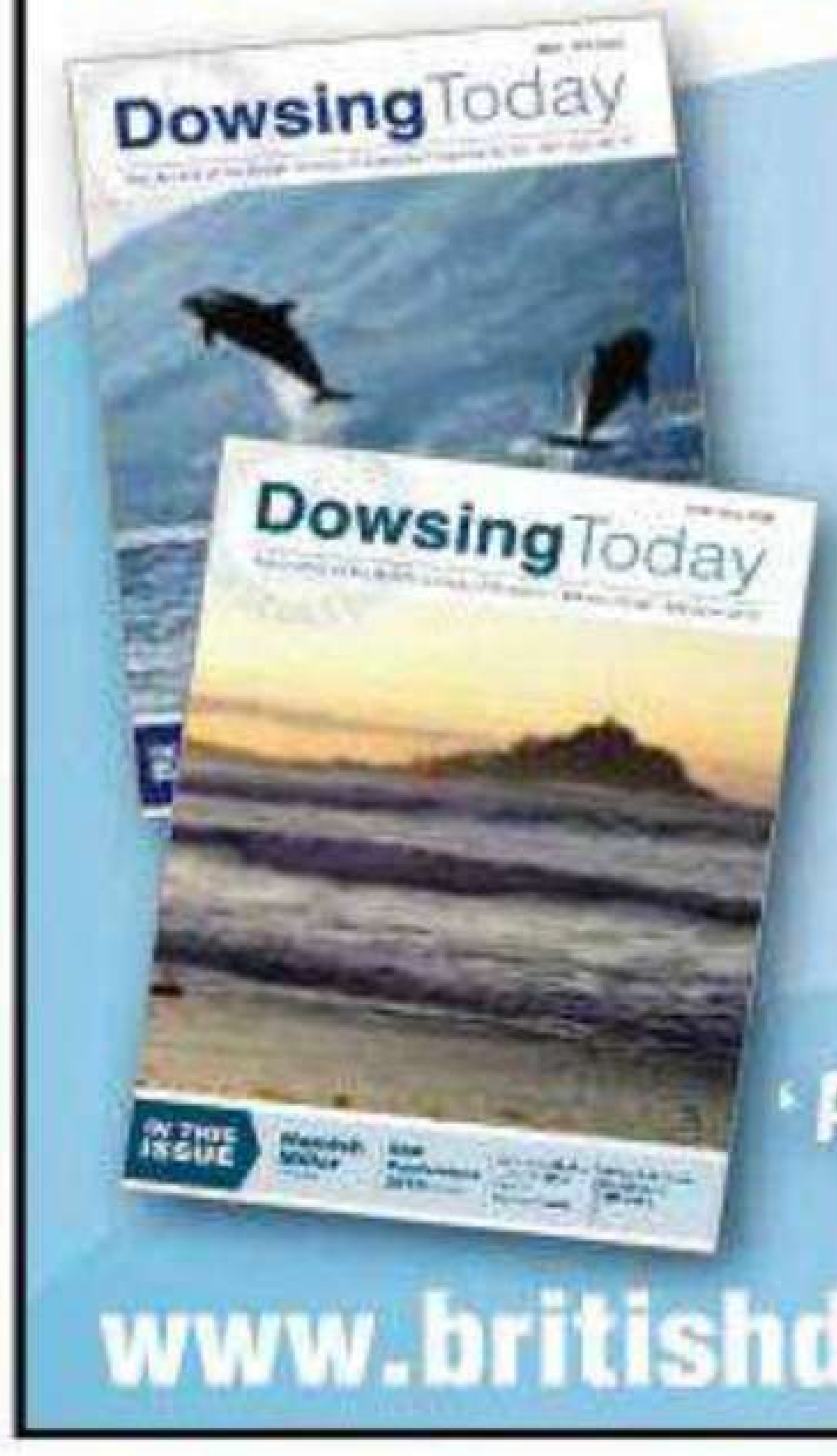
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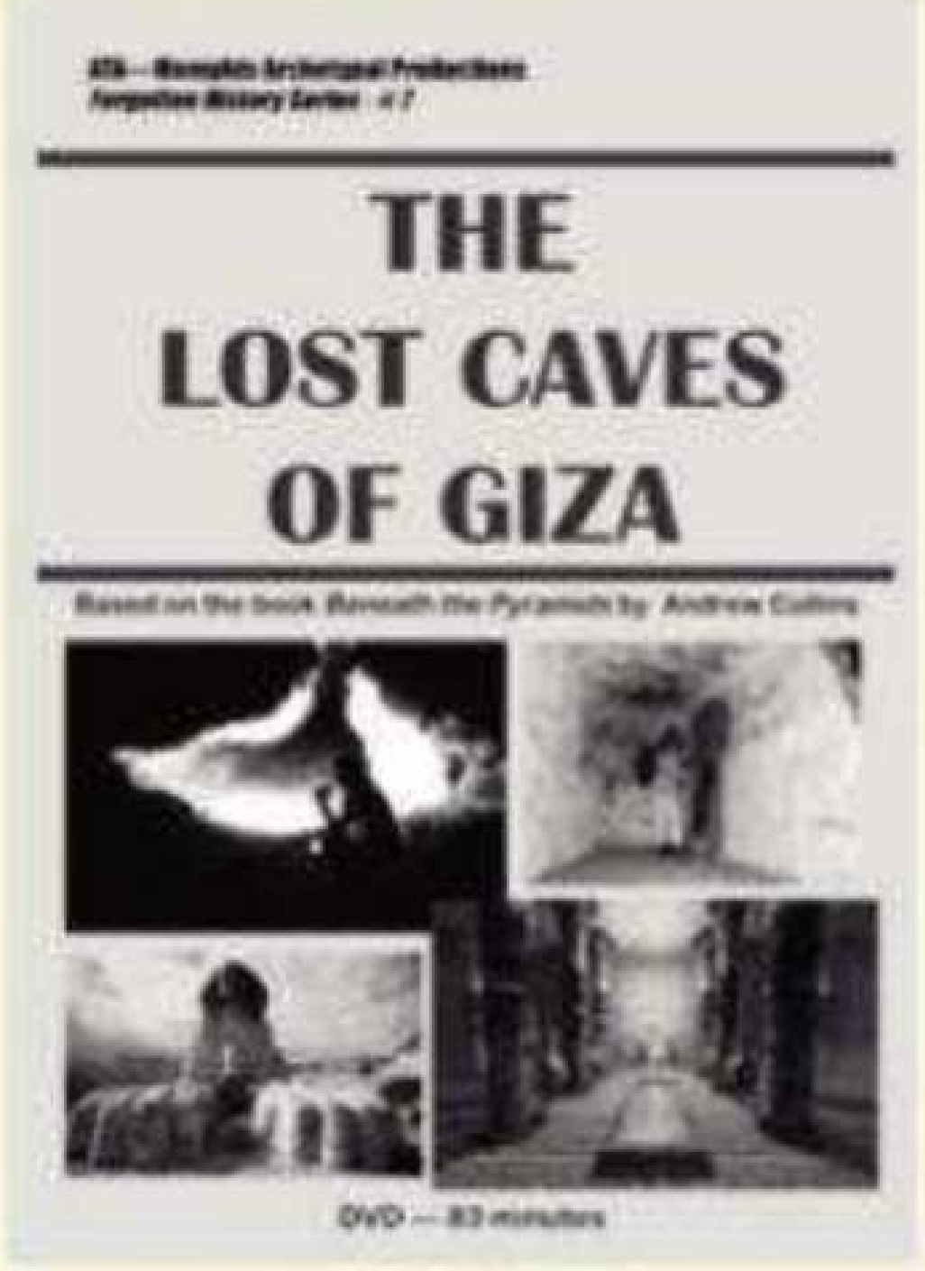
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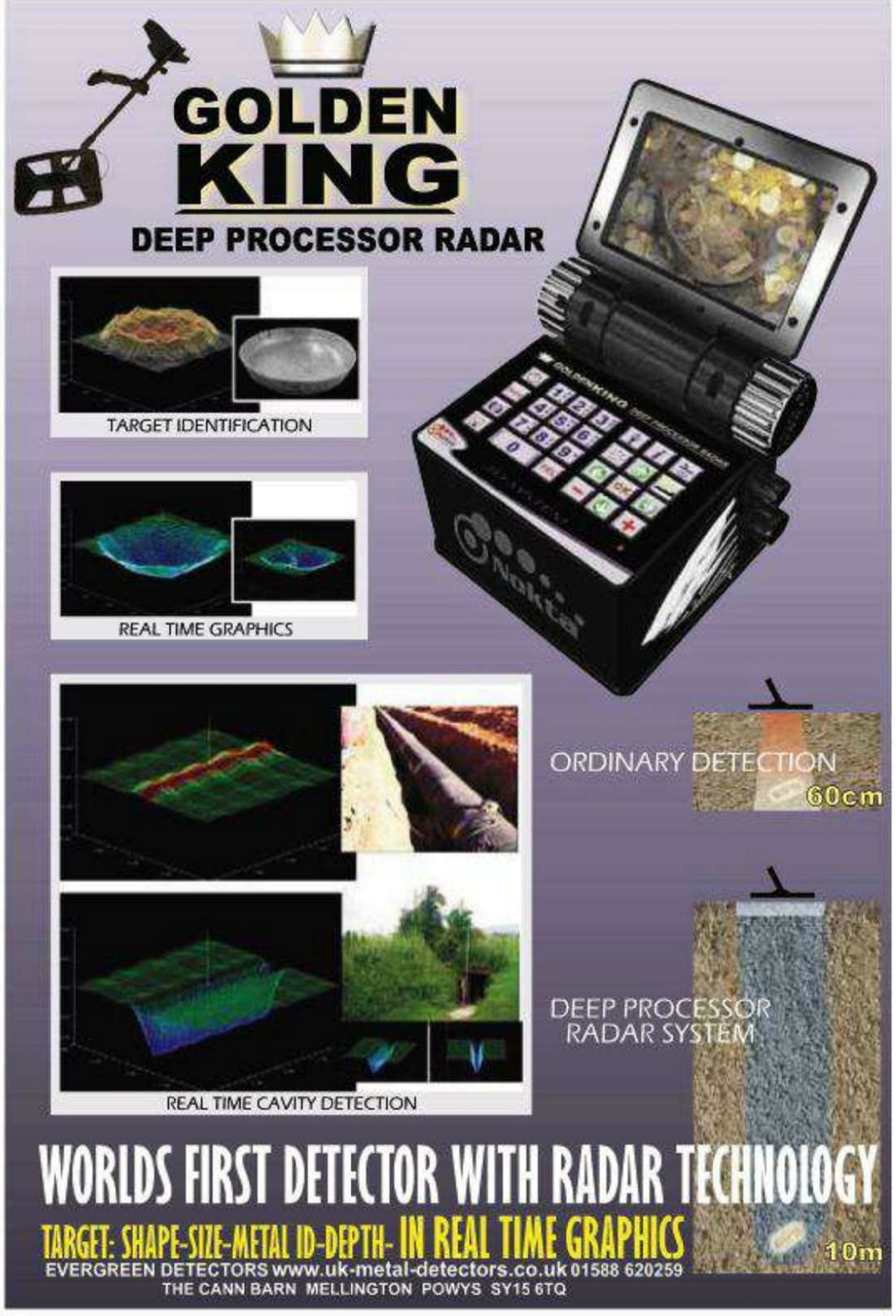
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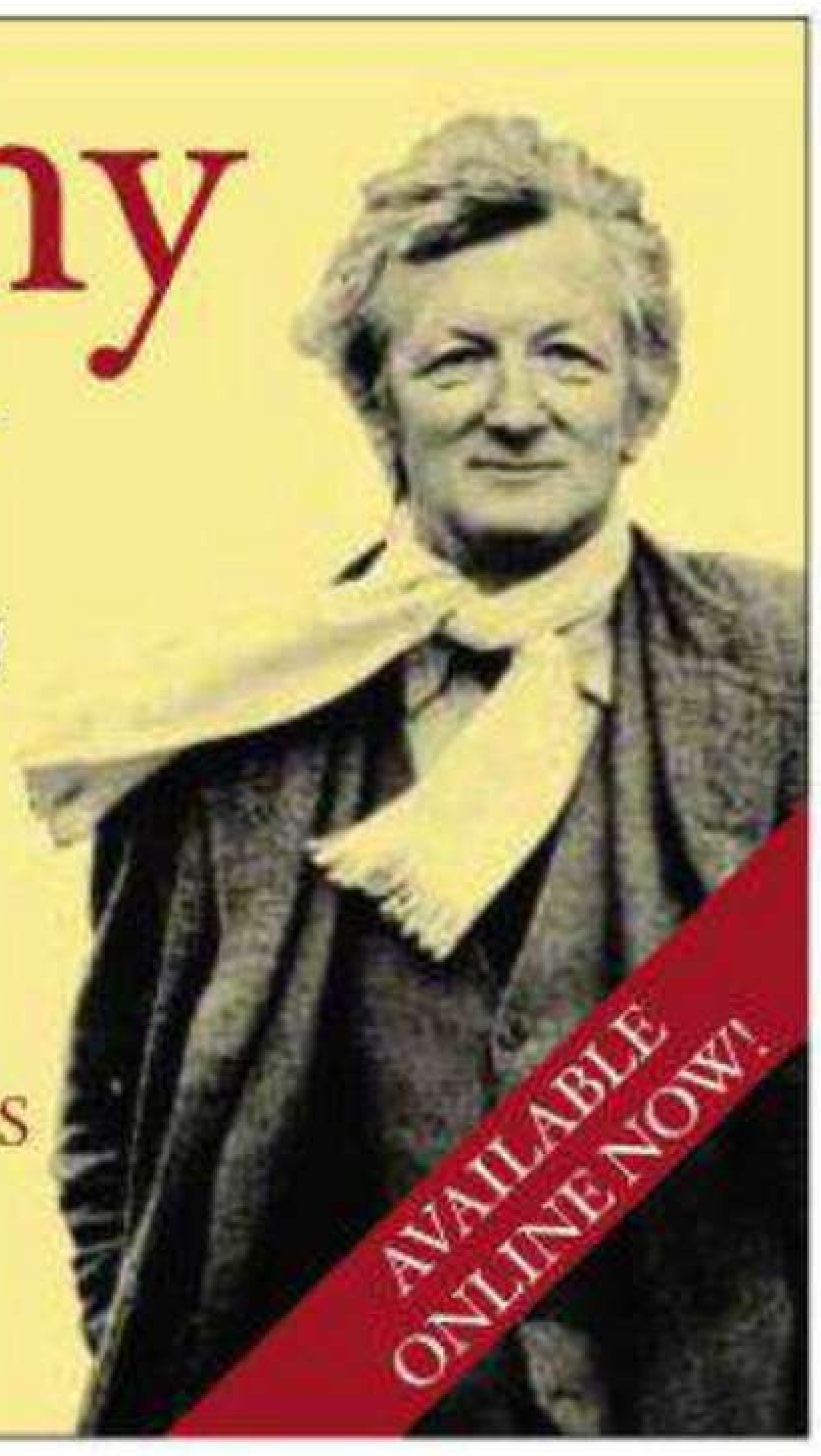
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Dear FT...

letters

Henge hoppers

I've been involved with setting up 'Henge Hoppers' – a new bus service run from the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes. We'll visit three of the Wessex 'superhenges' – Avebury, Marden and Durrington Walls – as well as Woodhenge, Stonehenge and the lovely Wiltshire landscape that they occupy. This will run initially at weekends and Bank Holidays, and later all week if it takes off.

The service is flexible, so people can get off to walk, then be picked up later. As we can include Pewsey station on our route (50 minutes from Paddington) it's possible to do all this in a day trip from London. Alternatively, as the tickets last two days, people could camp or stay over in a B&B, such as the famous Barge Inn in the centre of crop circle country, where the bus does stop.

Passengers pay £10 for the round trip and become members of the Wiltshire Archæological & Natural History Society for two days – free entry to the museum, 10 per cent discount at Stonehenge etc. We've just started running and Phil Harding is to do an official launch quite soon. See www.stonehenge-avebury-bus.org.uk/

Steve Marshall
www.stevemarshall.org.uk

British chameleons

I recently read the following on page 44 of *The fauna and flora of the Ilfracombe District of N.Devon* (1946) by MG Palmer: "A Chamaeleon, [sic] 'caught in a wood near Kentisbury by a member of the Openshaw family' many years ago, is in the Museum. The present Rector of Kentisbury, the Rev. C.L. Waller, kindly informs us that the previous Rector, the late Rev. J.O. Openshaw, used to shoot a good deal in the large wood at Cowley, in the north of the Parish. No further information concerning the occurrence of this African animal in North Devon has been obtainable."

I contacted the Kentisbury Museum but they had no knowledge of this chameleon and further investigations drew a blank. Does anyone know anything about British chameleons in folklore or cryptozoology, including this Devon one? Have there been records of fossil chameleons in Britain?

Richard Muirhead
Macclesfield, Cheshire

Probability

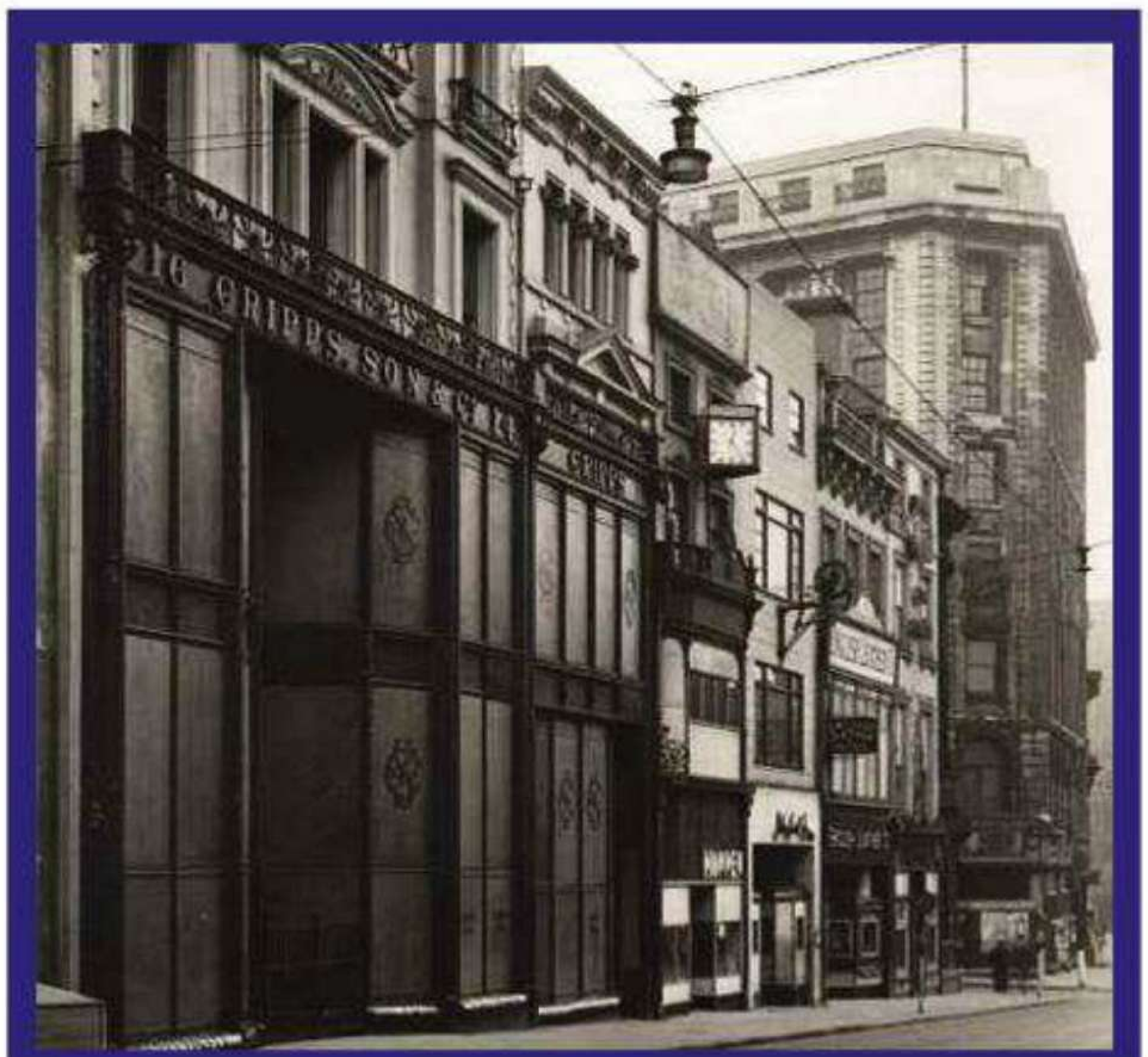
Guy Lyon Playfair may be right that Richard Wiseman is selective about his use of evidence [**FT275:52**], but Mr Playfair's poor grasp of statistical principles hardly helps his case. He seems to think unusual events require a paranormal explanation. No one would invoke the paranormal if a tossed coin landed heads seven times in a row – 1 in 128 chance, and therefore twice as unlikely as the quoted performance of the Russian psychic diagnoser, Natasha Demkina. Just because a single unusual event occurs, it doesn't mean that there are greater forces at work, regardless of how "microscopic" the chances of the event happening are.

As a researcher in statistics, I can confirm that five per cent significance tests are fine for initial exploratory work in the social sciences, but I certainly wouldn't engage in any medical treatment that had only been tested to this level in a single trial. Where you need to be really sure about something, you test at the 0.1 per cent (or an even more stringent) level, preferably meta-analysed across multiple trials. Claims of the paranormal are like medicine: extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, not the same test that would be used for something like seeing if men like crisps more than women.

The logical (and spurious) extension of Mr Playfair's analysis is that if you had 78 claimed psychics in a room trying to diagnose seven unwell people, one of them would show the mark of a 'real' psychic by getting four right. This is clearly ludicrous. In fact, if you had 5,000 random people in the room, the chances are that at least one would get all seven right. To be honest, the design of the whole experiment was very weak, so squabbling over the psychic/not psychic threshold is pointless.

Credible experiments to test apparently paranormal powers would feature control groups, repeated trials and appropriate significance testing. In the meantime, I recommend Mr Playfair picks up a copy of *Black Swan* by Nassim Nicholas Taleb for some accessible help with understanding very improbable events.

Neil Harrison
Bristol



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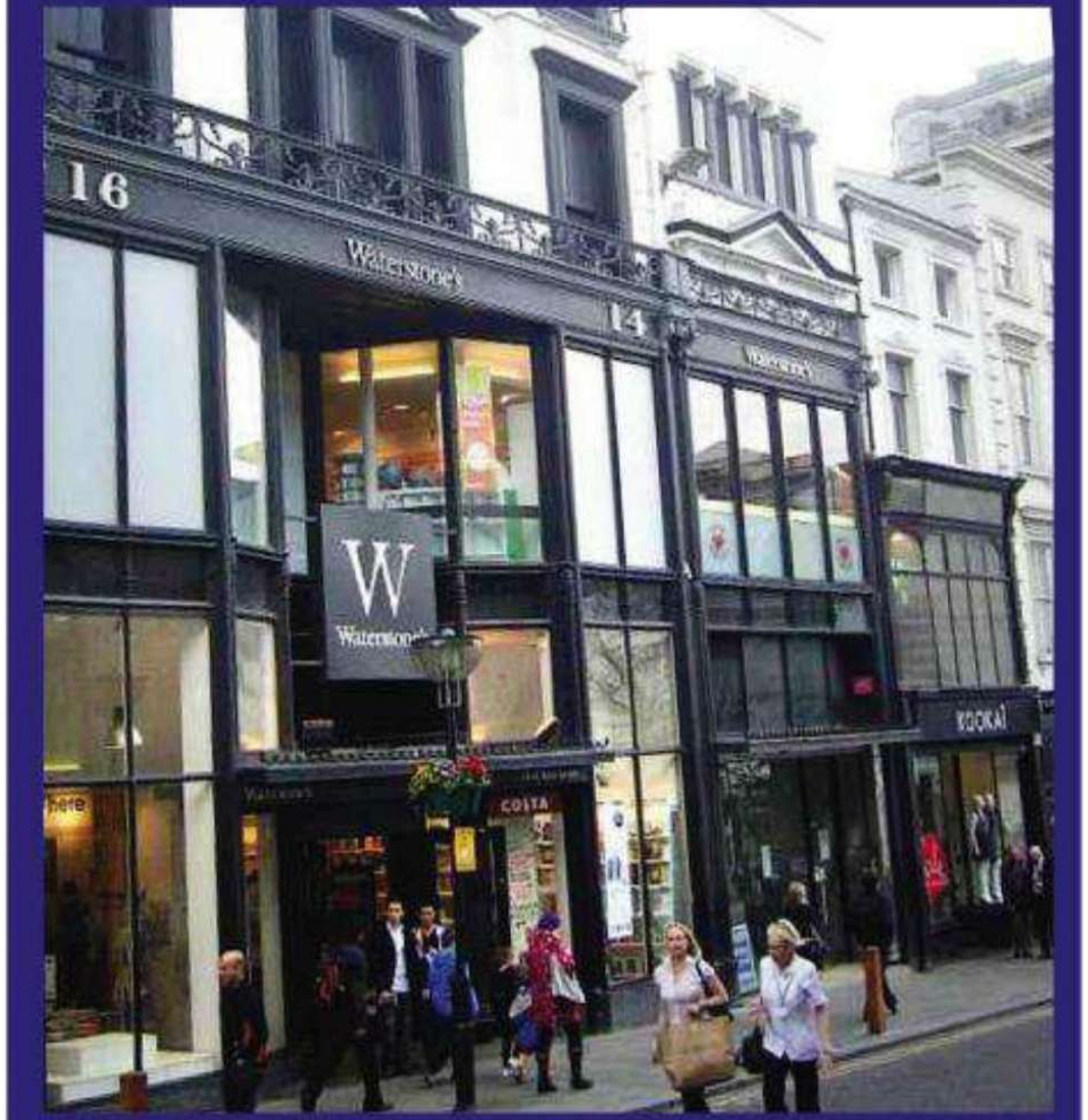


IRATE

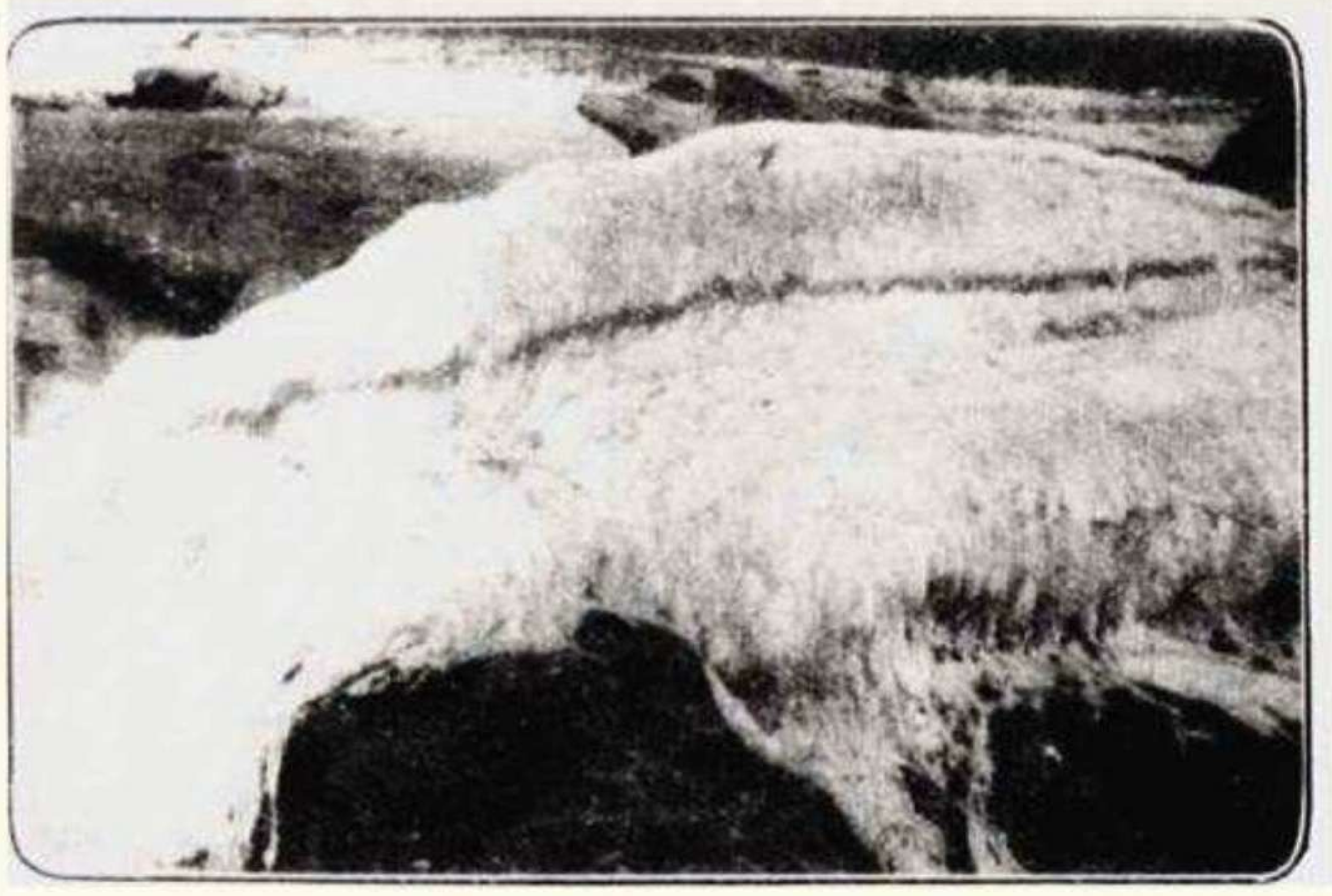
Liverpool timeslip

As a Liverpudlian, I was naturally intrigued by the story of the Liverpool copper who apparently slipped back 40 years in time in the city's Bold Street, as told by the Hierophant's Apprentice [**FT274:47**]. However, I was just as intrigued by the apparent timeslip evident in your two photographs of the street. The old photograph shows a 1930s-style plain-fronted building two doors down from Cripps/Waterstones, next to a shop called Hoppens. In the modern photograph this building, now next to Kookai, has mysteriously been transported back in time and now appears to be a mid-Victorian construction like its neighbours.

I await reports of phantom Green Goddess trams.

John Rimmer, *London*

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL



Bowmessie

Assuming it wasn't a group of otters or the work of pranksters pulling a large, cut-open tyre across Windermere, the suggestion that the 'creature' photographed by the kayakers in February 2011 [**FT274:4–5**] was a large catfish from Eastern Europe is unlikely. Under the right conditions, catfish can grow to immense sizes. The catfish in the Segre, a tributary of the River Ebro in Spain (illustrated **FT264:24–25**) are a good example, as in that particular environment there is a superabundance of food and the water is warm enough for them to feed all year round with continuous weight gain, whereas that wouldn't be the case in the cold waters of Windermere. While pike don't grow large enough, the possibility that Bowmessie is a gigantic eel is more credible. A tiny proportion of eels, usually female, never migrate back to the Sargasso Sea to spawn and remain in land-locked lakes where they can grow larger than normal. Could Lake Windermere, at 10½ miles (17km) long and a depth in places of up to 220ft (67m), contain a food supply sufficient to sustain a 15ft (4.6m) long fish? A better question is what kind of fish could survive and grow large in such an environment?

If there is a large aquatic creature lurking in the depths of the lake, the most likely identity is a sturgeon. The European sturgeon is known to grow to about 12ft (3.7m) long and up to 660lb (300kg) and is normally a sluggish, bottom-feeding fish with populations in large glacial freshwater lakes. On rare occasions when large sturgeon come up to the surface, they are a bizarre sight with an arched back covered in a row of bony plates while the rest of the body remains submerged. They resemble no other fish because of their somewhat prehistoric appearance coupled with a narrow snout, broader body and long, tapering tail. The observation that the creature seen in 2006 displayed three humps, whereas the one photographed this February had four would be explicable by the number of bony plates on the back that broke the surface, the speed, depth and angle at which the fish might have been swimming or how calm the lake surface was on each different day. To create a wave that lifted a swimmer in July 2009 would require a fish with a fairly wide cross-section rather than an eel. It may be that 1.3 million passengers on lake cruises and experienced boat crews have never spotted anything unusual; but just because you can't see it, doesn't mean to say that it isn't there. Sturgeon are elusive, shy fish and don't normally come near the surface at the best of times, even less so if they're continually disturbed by boats churning the water.

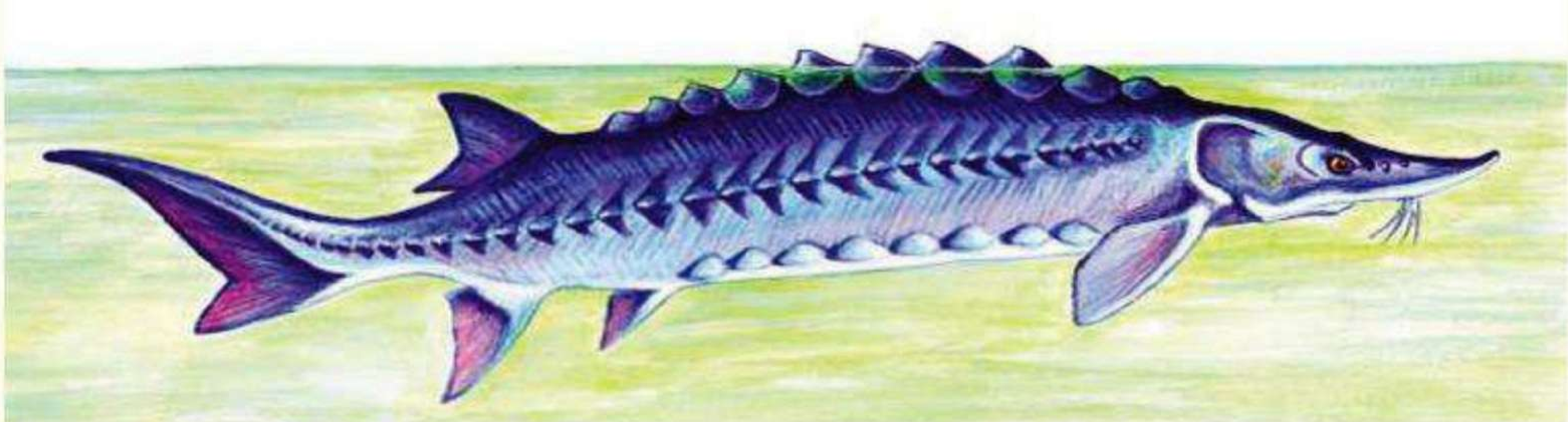
But canoeists and swimmers needn't worry too much. Even if there was a Leviathan sturgeon lurking deep within Windermere, they have no teeth and feed by sucking in crustaceans, molluscs and small fish stirred up from the lake sediment by using their pointed snouts and sensitive barbels. This isn't as far-fetched as it sounds. Aquatic centres regularly stock foot-long (30cm) juvenile sturgeon, usually for sale at £50 each as pond fish. It's possible someone introduced one or two into the lake sometime in the past. To have reached a length of 15ft (4.6m), a sturgeon would have to be decades old, as they are very slow-growing and take 20 years to reach maturity. Sturgeon can live for well over a century, which might explain the sporadic sightings in Windermere dating back to the 1950s. Ichthyology aside, Bowmessie will do Lake District tourism no harm at all!

Mike Fryer
Colchester, Essex

Re Bowmessie, the Windermere lake "monster": I have to admit to thinking it was a loose log at first, but then I had a closer look at the latest photo and it does raise a few queries. The "monster" has a wake and appears to be moving at speed. Windermere is only drained at its southern end, by the river Leven, so water moves from the north quite gently. Would an item floating freely in the lake create a significant wake if it was just drifting along? Also, "Bowmessie" may be travelling northwards if the photo was taken from the eastern shore and I have correctly identified the two islands in the picture as Hen Holme and Lady Holme. Recently, otters have been seen in Windermere for the first time for years, and of course there are many other explanations available, but I am quite disappointed in the negativity expressed by many locals. Bowmessie is a great example of forteana being fun, so I think we should enjoy having a new lake monster to look for rather than dismissing it out of hand.

Anyone visiting the Lake District on a Bowmessie-hunting expedition is more than welcome to call into the Mintcake Mine shop in Bowness to stock up on Kendal Mint Cake and other nice things. Yes, I have taken my daft idea for Mintcake Mining to its logical conclusion and opened a gift shop! (See www.mintcakemine.com for details.)

Colin Bowden
Bowness on Windermere



MIKE FRYER

Trunko – probably

Dr Karl Shuker's de-trunking of Trunko [**FT275:42**] is an excellent piece of detective work – but there is one significant flaw in his argument. His key piece of evidence when making the identification is the previously overlooked account and photographs by AK Jones. Dr Shuker points out that Jones "had not personally experienced" the original sighting, but goes on to say:

"What we do know, and what is much more important anyway, is what he did experience personally – the beached Trunko carcase".

But do we know this? What we actually have is an account of an object beached on an entirely different occasion, some time after the first beaching, and – if Jones's timings are correct – over a month after the original sighting, neither of which Jones was directly connected with. Other than the fact that its general description fits that of Trunko, there is nothing other than circumstantial evidence to link this beached object with that seen weeks earlier; Jones merely *assumes* it is the same, and Dr Shuker seems to have accepted this as fact. But even that description is somewhat at odds: Jones describes a beast 15ft (4.6m) long, but Ballance measured his at 47ft (14m). Quite a discrepancy…

Of course, Dr Shuker is probably right, it probably *is* the same object, and those discrepancies can probably be explained by decomposition of the mass of blubber. But, like the legal department of a lager marketing company, we should probably insist on inclusion of the word 'probably'.

Toby Venables
Everton, Bedfordshire

Sheepdog

The supposed lamb that looks like a dog [**FT275:12**] quite clearly *is* a dog. Many sheep-herding cultures have bred dogs that look like sheep and live with the sheep to guard them from predators. They do not herd the sheep but live among them with minimal human contact, and therefore smell like sheep too, so that the sheep accept them. Examples include the Italian Maremma and Hungarian Puli. Probably what has happened is a ewe has lost her lamb or become confused and has started licking a puppy of one of these dogs. The question is exactly what the sheep owner is playing at, because he will be perfectly aware that he owns dogs that look like sheep – either he is extremely gullible or is hoping the Western world is!

Jennifer Thorp
Staffordshire

SLI on the stage

I was interested in Hilary Evans's article on streetlight interference [**FT273:52–55**]. I wonder how far back instances of the phenomenon have been reported. In John Van Druten's 1950 play *Bell, Book and Candle*, the character Nicky proves his magical prowess to a sceptic by making street lights flash on and off on command. Since both the original play and the 1959 movie version (where Nicky was played by Jack Lemmon) were, I believe, popular and successful, a number of people might have seen one or both and thus been more likely to take note of seeming SLI occurrences around them (and to have associated them with supernatural powers rather than assuming coincidence etc.).

Dennis Lien
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Family imprisonment

I appreciate that imprisoning one's wife in a cellar for 16 years, "or possibly only eight" [**FT274:16**] is no subject for levity, but I feel that Furquim is a less than appropriate name for a Brazilian, especially in an issue that featured the subject of hypertrichosis.

Paul Block
Felixstowe, Suffolk

Nuclear remedy

Reading **FT9** last night, I noticed the following snippet: "Further to our gossip last issue about the Japanese nuclear ship, whose reactor had, in mid-voyage, to be patched up with old socks. A note in the *Weekly News*, 21 Sept 1974, added that previously boiled rice was being used to plug the leaks of the radioactive coolant. That's progress." I found it rather topical in light of the recent disaster in Japan. Perhaps a timely reminder of this technical solution would bear fruit today?

- In response to D Sayers's letter and picture of an "Odd mist" [**FT275:67**], I propose that the "hump" in the mist could have been caused by a manure heap in the field.

Paul Jackson
MoD Boscombe Down, Wiltshire

Cat cull

Regarding the Mythchaser [**FT274:17**] about whether a mediæval cull of cats led indirectly to the Black Death by removing the rats' chief predator: in 1740, Grace Sherwood, the falsely accused "Witch of Pungo", died of natural causes in what is now Virginia Beach, Virginia. Her fellow townspeople, fearing her spirit would possess a feline medium, systematically killed every pet and stray cat they could find. This event directly let to the Great Rat Infestation that occurred a few years later.

Tamy Kay Thompson
Newport News, Virginia

Roaming raccoons

Regarding the raccoon or raccoons photographed in and around the village of Ringwood in the New Forest [**FT274:10**]: On 16 April 2011, my wife and I camped on a working farm and campsite called Bush Farm, also known as The Bison Centre, at West Knoyle in Wiltshire. The farm features a herd of bison, a herd of elk, some red deer, South American ostriches and other "exotic" species – including raccoons, which live in a patch of woodland on the farm. West Knoyle is approximately 22 miles (35km) as the crow flies from both Poulner and Redlynch and not much further from Christchurch. Could Bush Farm have had some escapees?

John and Wendy Batty
Tilehurst, Berkshire

Regarding the Ringwood raccoon (or raccoons): I tipped off David Purnell, a friend who lives in Ringwood, who wrote to his MP on the issue. Desmond Swayne MP responded: "Sorry, no policy on raccoons." David commented: "Yet again we catch the Tories napping on an issue."

Matt Salusbury
By email

Ominous humming

To the interesting stories of humming noises in connection with UFOs, fairy lore and portal areas in Jenny Randles's article, "Aerial Buzzes and Humming Hills" [**FT273:27**], I would like to add the buzzing sounds heard during the Marian apparitions at Fátima, which also included mysterious lights in the sky, "the miracle of the Sun", and other UFO-like phenomena. (See **FT197:8–9**)

"We would follow the children and kneel in the middle of the field. Lucia would raise her hands and say, 'You bade me come here, what do you wish of me?' And then could be heard a buzzing that seemed to be that of a bee. I took care to discern whether it was the Lady speaking." (Fátima witness Maria Carreira, quoted in the book *Heavenly Lights* referenced on the website below).

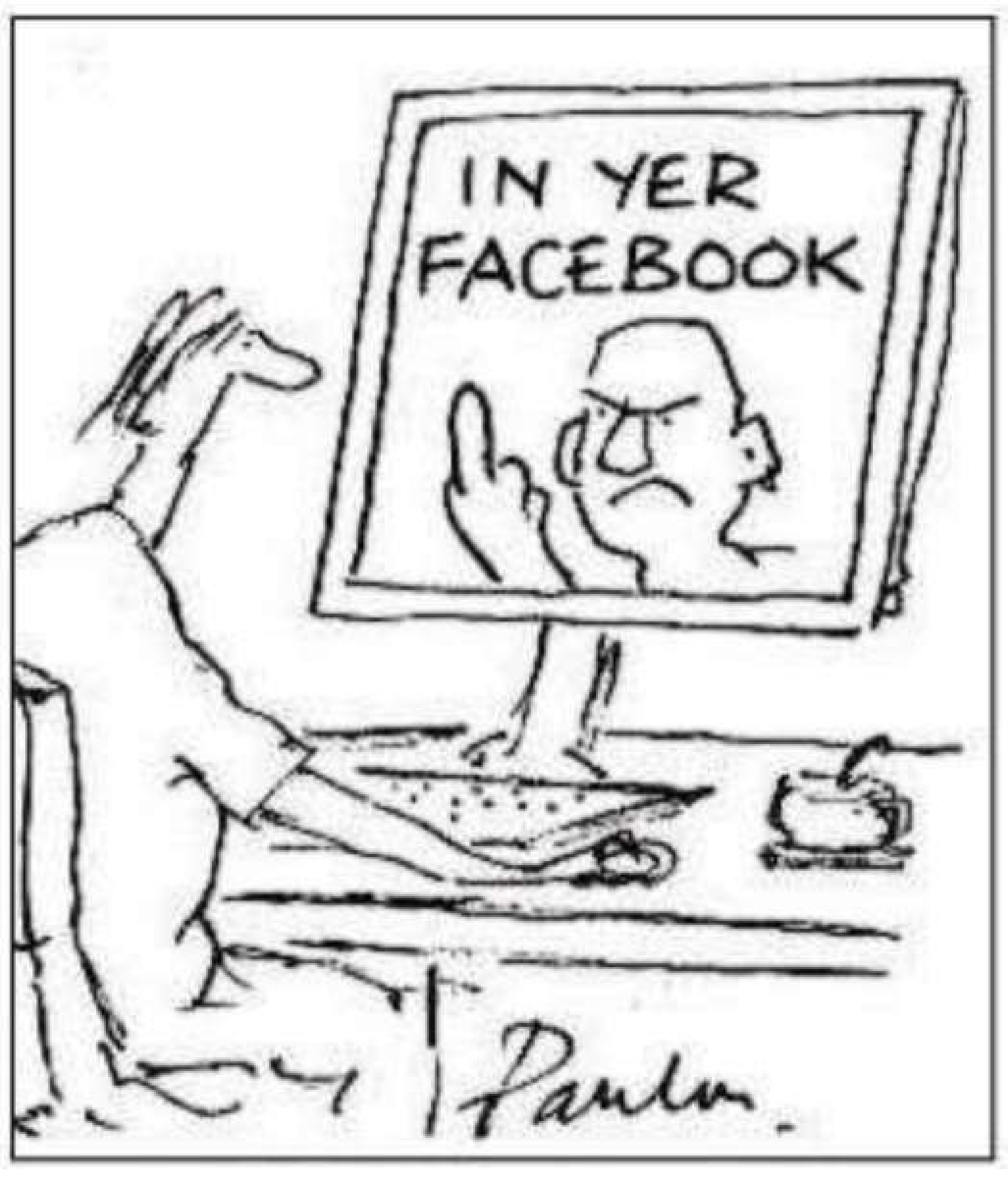
"I heard a sound, a din, such as a great fly makes inside an empty water pot." (Manuel Marto, Fátima witness and father of Jacinta and Francisco).

"Mr Manuel Marto explained to us that, during the entire duration of the appearance, those present heard an indefinable sound, like that which is heard next to a hive, but altogether more harmonious, even though words were not heard." (Italian priest Humberto Pasquale, investigator of the Fátima event).

"On July 13, I was at Cova da Iria. She [Lucia] knelt… While Lucia was listening to a response, it seemed there was a buzzing sound like that of a cicada." (Fátima witness Antonio Baptista). http://bit.ly/moDiJW (frontierscience.us).

Buzzing sounds were also heard in connection with the Marian apparitions at Garabandal in Spain. I seem to recall that some of the so-called "false visionaries" that arose after Bernadette at Lourdes also reported buzzing noises in the Grotto.

Chris Woodyard
Dayton, Ohio



PAUL TAYLOR

it happened to me...

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North Sea adventure

In 1979, when I was 10 years old, my family spent a holiday at a caravan site in Trimingham near Cromer in Norfolk. My dad took us all fishing off the beach below the cliffs where our caravan site was. It was dusk when my mum took my younger brother back up the steep steps to put him to bed. My sister escorted them, taking our only torch, and was under instructions to return with it. Earlier my dad had been talking about Neptune, god of the seas. We had imagined a great giant with a beard and fork arising up from the sea.

In the eerie twilight, a small black shape emerged out of the water quite some distance away. We watched as it came steadily towards us, wondering what it could be. My dad stood up to get a better look at it. It was large, about the size and shape of an orca whale's fin but thicker. Somehow I knew it wasn't an animal. It didn't move erractically or submerge and emerge again, but came puposefully and silently in a straight line directly towards us out of the gloom.

I realised my dad was quite alarmed. We both instinctively knew that what was out there was 'wrong'. He grabbed the fishing rod and held it up like a weapon, shouting at my sister to turn the light off. She was coming back down the cliff steps bouncing the light around. Immediately the thing advancing towards us stopped about 30 yards (27m) away and stayed there for what seemed like ages. I got the feeling it was observing us as we prepared to run back up the cliff steps should it get any nearer.

Eventually, it moved off horizontally along the water and out of sight into the night. We packed up hastily and retreated back to the caravan in case it should return. The next day, we were travelling home from our holiday. My dad asked an old fisherman if he'd seen anything strange along the coastline. He said that he had but didn't seem to want to elaborate. My dad, sister and I believe that we were either witnesses to an alien spacecraft (under the water) or to a submersible developed by the Ministry of Defence, which has a base in Trimingham.

Tracy Kinsella
Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Lights over Coventry

At about 10.15pm on Good Friday (10 April) 2009, I stepped outside my house in Allesley, Coventry, to check that the car was locked up and noticed a moving, illuminated cloud. This hovered in the centre of my vision, moved to the right and split into two, then fused back into one and moved left. The same sequence was repeated many times – my wife and I watched it for about 20 minutes. At first we thought it could be a police helicopter, but there was no noise. Our next hypothesis was ball lightning, but there was no rain and no thunder. I know that many UFO sightings report an object splitting in two, but this didn't seem like anything other than a natural event of some sort. It was quite beautiful: an appropriate sight for Good Friday.

Dr Simon Cooke
Coventry, West Midlands

UFO over Lough Neagh?

I was born and have lived most of my life in Northern Ireland. As I was born in the early Eighties, it was a very common sight to see helicopters of various descriptions belonging to the military flying about at various times of the day and night. I therefore knew them by sight very well indeed and because they were so common we rarely took much notice of them. However, the following incident took place about a year after the end of the Troubles, when the security level had been lowered but the military presence was still maintained.

I was living in a bungalow along the shore of Lough Neagh; the view of the Lough was hidden by a small strip of trees. The area was rural and fairly sparsely populated. One evening when I was about 13, my brother, who was then about six, and I were outside our house in the garden and saw to the north a very bright light moving above the tree line. It drew our attention initially by its brightness, but we quickly realised that it was also moving in a very erratic and bizarre manner.

The light appeared to be perhaps 20 times larger than a star or planet appears in the sky. The light moved up, down and looped about then stopped dead. It then began moving again and resumed its erratic and very quick motion. At times it appeared to move back on itself in very sharp and intricate movements. This occurred about three times with the object moving very fast towards the east and then stopping dead each time. After the final pause, the object began to move again and then shot away to the east extremely quickly and vanished from sight. In all it must have flown about a half mile (800m) above the trees.

I must emphasise that I have never seen a helicopter or plane that could manœuvre in this highly erratic manner or at such speed. I have often thought about this incident and wondered if it was a military vehicle or weapon being tested on the shoreline above the trees. However, I have never seen any vehicle or weapon which is able to move in this fashion or which gives off such light. I would be very interested to hear of any suggestions as to what I might have seen.

Bronach McElhone
By email

Disc attacked

This incident occurred sometime in the late 1970s (I don't like being imprecise with details but I was only 10–11 at the time and the only way I can be roughly sure of the date is that the person I experienced this with was a friend of mine and we used to spend our spare time together). We were walking up Sandown High Street on the Isle of Wight – I am pretty sure it was a Sunday afternoon as everything was closed and it must have been winter as there wasn't a soul around – when our attention was drawn to a sound that I can only describe as very loud gears grinding coming from above. It was an overcast day but there was a break in the clouds and into this break flew a silver disc – the Sun glinting off it as it passed overhead. This was followed a few seconds later by a Lightning aircraft (subsequent service in the RAF leaves me pretty certain on this point). As the Lightning passed through the break in the clouds, a flash was seen from its port wing and a missile launched – presumably at the disc. My friend and I ran in the direction that the object and aircraft flew in, but we neither saw nor heard anything further. I don't recall any mention of this in local media and our parents were pretty nonplussed when we told them.

David Bruin
By email

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FORTEAN TRAVELLER

75. Secrets of Sardinia

MARK PILKINGTON explores life, death and rebirth amongst the mysterious Nuragic peoples of ancient Sardinia. Photographs by the author.

ABOVE: Cut into the walls of the valley, the 'fairy tombs' of Montessu date from 3400 BC.

Think of Sardinia and you might think of its Emerald Coast, playground of Italy's super-rich, most famously Silvio Berlusconi, who entertains guests with a remote-control volcano. But the thong-clad hordes are only the most recent invaders of this beautiful, rugged isle, just a little larger than Wales, that sits like a stepping stone between Europe and Africa. Scratch Sardinia's arid surface and a rich history of civilisation flows out, one that can be traced back to the Neolithic and encompasses almost every major power of the region in the past 6,000 years.

Over the course of its history, Sardinia's guest book (an important feature of every tourist destination in the country) has been signed by Italians, Spaniards, Berbers, Moors, Byzantines, Vandals, Romans, Phœnicians and innumerable permutations of the above, many of whom left artefacts and architecture behind when they left. But these were all johnny-come-latelys compared to the original, elusive Sards.

Some of the earliest signs of human culture on the island can be found amongst the *Domus de Janas*, or fairy tombs, cut into the walls of a rocky green valley at Montessu in the southwest. Dating from about 3400 BC, the 35 tombs discovered in this natural amphitheatre command a god's-eye view of the wide plain surrounding modern-day Villaperuccio, whose backyards are dotted with enormous menhirs erected during the same period. What little is known about the people who lived and died here can be found carved into the walls of the two most impressive tombs at the site, commanding spectacular vistas from the eastern and western ends of the valley's two arms.

Rumours say archæologists found giant skeletons here

A steep, rocky path, part of it comprising the original road laid by the tomb-builders, approaches the valley and you soon start to see the small, dark tomb entrances dotted like swallows' nests amongst the rock walls. The easternmost tomb is cut horizontally into the soft rock of the cliff face. Originally composed of two sections, the burial space itself and an antechamber for offerings from the living, this 'oven' tomb's domed ceiling collapsed centuries ago and was stolen by farmers or shepherds, revealing an elliptical curved space whose walls are covered with intricate carvings.

Spirals cover the rear and side walls; these were associated with a female deity and the eternal cycle of life and death (on average a mere 20 to 30 years for people at the time) and perhaps symbolic rebirth. Some patches of wall are still stained red with ochre, suggesting that this was a womb as well as a tomb. The goddess was also closely connected to water, a precious commodity for all ancient peoples, raising the question of whether the spirals decorating the tomb might represent whorls or eddies on the water's surface. Statues of the goddess herself show an angular, cruciform figure with two jutting breasts, whose outline can be seen imprinted into the walls of other tombs at the site. Also cut into the wall here are what might be a false doorway – another symbol, perhaps, for the entrance into a new life or afterlife – and a representation of wooden supports, intended to make this home for the dead reflect the homes of the living below. The outer chamber of the tomb is also decorated with multiple vertical tongues that have been interpreted as teeth (maybe to ward off grave-robbers or spirits) bull horns, (symbol of the masculine deity) or perhaps just Neolithic bunting.

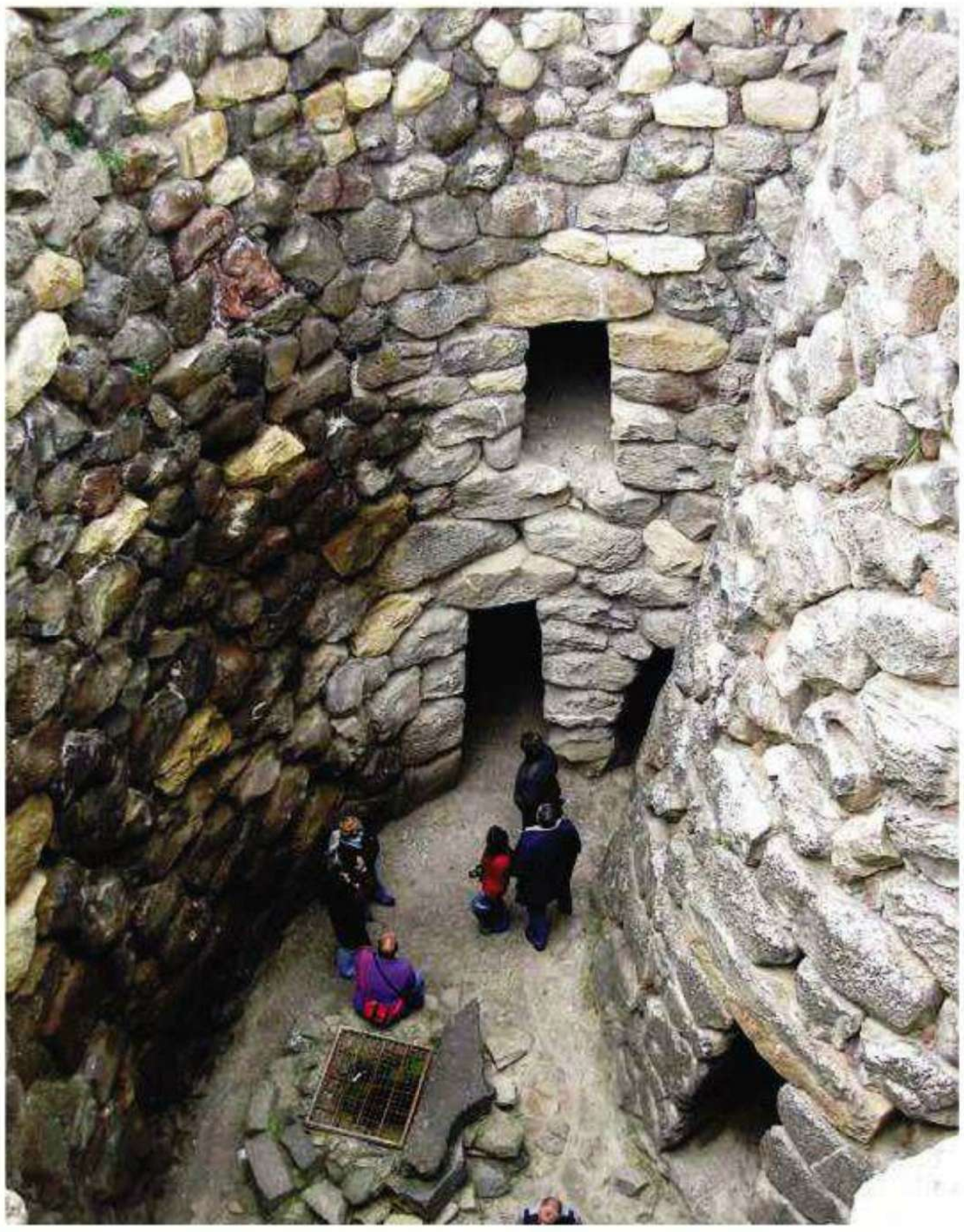
Over on the western arm of the valley is an older tomb, this one dug vertically, and more laboriously, into the rock floor. Dropping down into the cool, cramped cave, checking first for signs of scurrying critters, you are instantly aware that this was a place of death. Very little sunlight has struck these walls in millennia, but there is just enough light to make out a series of elegant and striking bull horn motifs carved into them, one of which forms the step into and out of the tomb – the bull god carries us from life into death and, for the lucky ones, back again. Bull motifs can also be seen at another necropolis site from the same period, Anghelu Ruju in northwest Sardinia, and appear throughout the Anatolian and Mediterranean region – the 'sacred cow' was as vital as water to these early agricultural societies.

These two key tombs at Montessu were family tombs, probably belonging to the rulers of the community below, and would have contained many generations of dead. It's thought that before interment bodies were stripped of flesh, perhaps cleaned by animals in a form of excarnation similar to that still carried out in Tibet and Iran. Over 100 skeletons were found inside the bull tomb, and archæologists speculate that once it was filled the previous inhabitants would be removed to make way for new bones. The tomb builders certainly respected their dead, but they weren't precious. Additionally, many of the larger tombs at both Montessu and Anghelu Ruju were reused by later cultures as homes for the living. Either unaware or unconcerned by their previous funerary function, these squatters moved in and redecorated, carving out doorways, windows and, in the case of Roman settlers 3,000 years later, installing columns and statuary.

Who these first tomb-building Sardinians were may never be known. Archæologists refer to them broadly as the Ozieri culture, after beakers and other artefacts found near the town of Ozieri, and they're thought to have reached the island from the surrounding mainlands of Italy, Spain, even Greece or Turkey. Their culture was superseded about two millennia later by another that left behind an incredible wealth of archæological and architectural evidence but remains barely less mysterious as a people. Even the origin of their name, the *Nuragici* or Nuragic people, remains uncertain, though it may stem from the Sardinian words for piles of stones or mounds, *nurra*, which is what many of their great towers were before being excavated. There are as many as 7,000 surviving Nuragic sites – from towers and fortresses to homes, wells and graves – scattered all over Sardinia, and it's estimated that at their peak in the late Bronze Age, there were over 20,000.

Despite the vast number of sites on the island, it wasn't until the mid-20th century that any systematic attempt to unearth and connect them was made. It was a Sardinian archæologist, Giovanni Lilliu, who in 1951 began excavating a prominent mound on a plateau next to the town of Barumini. What Lilliu and his team found after six years of digging was an enormous and ancient fortified palace, surrounded by a large village.

Visiting the site today, it's hard to believe that the central tower, which stands over 18m (60ft) tall and has walls 7m (23ft) thick, was built over 3,500 years ago – it would be impressive if it had been built in AD 1600, let alone 1600 BC. The tower is constructed from basalt rocks, the largest weighing three tonnes, with smaller stones filling in the gaps where later cultures would use cement. Smaller towers were added at each cardinal point in about 1500 BC, and around them was built another 8m (26ft)-high wall. Access to the three-story central tower was gained only via a small doorway 8m up, reached using a ladder on a rope: although also a home, this was, first and foremost, a fortress.

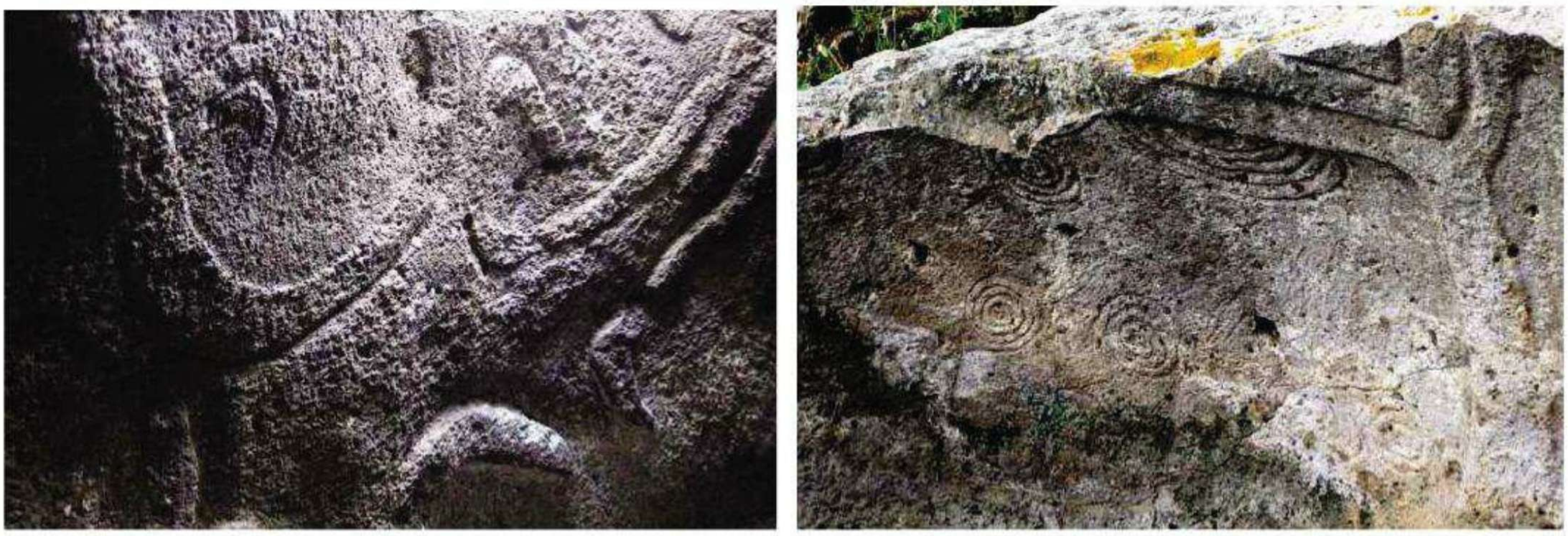


ABOVE: The central tower of Barumni, built from basalt rocks 3,500 years ago.

The sheer scale of the construction is overwhelming; it's no wonder that this and other Nuragic structures like the long "Giants' Tomb" burial chambers, with their distinctive, menhir-like central standing stones and curved, taurine (bulls again) entrances, were attributed to a race of titans. Rumours persist that archæologists found skeletal remnants of these giants during the excavation of the site, and that the discovery has been kept secret by the Vatican – a conspiracy theory that perhaps says something about Sardinia's relationship to mainland Italy.

But it's not all about size: there's an innate elegance and intelligence to the structure that is hard to ignore. The Nuragic people have left no trace of their writing behind – if they used papyri they all appear to have rotted away – but they must have employed some means of calculating and communicating measurements, because all of the towers at Barumini are built to the same proportions. Sophisticated architectural and engineering skills must have been employed throughout the construction process: the top of each tower was widened using intricately fitted buttressing, forming bulbous turrets that have since fallen away but can be seen in contemporary models found in the surrounding area. The positioning and orientation of each tower was also carefully thought through: the central tower sits above a 20m (66ft) well which is fed by a still-active spring; the south tower, which caught the most sunlight, and so was the warmest, was used for living and sleeping, while the north, the coolest, was used to preserve food. The doorway to the central tower also points south, allowing it to draw in the most light. The inside of each tower was covered with insulating clay, while the floors and carved benches were covered in cork for extra comfort.

That this fortress palace was constructed to house a royal or noble family is beyond doubt, but who exactly they were defending themselves from nobody knows. Additional layers of fortification, from arrow slits to thicker walls, were added to the building over the centuries, until it was abandoned at the end of the Nuragic period in about 600 BC. The island probably came under regular attack, given its position at the centre of the Mediterranean, though the invaders at Barumini weren't



BELOW: Male and female: carvings in the Montesu tombs depict the horns of the bull god and whorls and eddies recalling the Goddess's links to water.

ABOVE LEFT: Looking up out of the goddess well at Santa Cristina.

ABOVE RIGHT: One of the great menhirs at Villaperucio.

necessarily from other lands. As my host Massimo wryly pointed out, generations-long feuds still exist between neighbouring towns in Sardinia, so the *Nuragici* were likely to have been as busy fighting each other as they were invaders.

The village surrounding the keep began to take form in about 1300 BC. It's a densely packed site; stone paths wind between the well-preserved remains of each building, and it's not hard to imagine the sounds of clacking stone, chopping wood, bleating goats and lowing cattle that would have been heard here. Houses were built with circular stone bases and wooden roofs, and by 800–700 BC had become complex multi-roomed affairs. The larger buildings incorporate stone tubs to collect rain water for drinking and bathing, but also probably for spiritual purposes: the water goddess-worship associated with Montessu survived in some form into the Nuragic period.

My own doubts about the spiritual role of water for the Nuragic people were swiftly dispelled by a visit to perhaps the most stunning, and certainly best preserved, of all their surviving structures, the goddess well at Santa Cristina, near Paulilatino in the island's mid-west. Part of a large settlement that includes a tower and a large, circular meeting hall, the well was built in about 1200 BC, at the height of the Nuragic civilisation. It has been immaculately preserved, ironically thanks to Christian monks who, in the 12th century AD, buried it to prevent the locals from worshipping there. The site was re-discovered in 1967 when a major road was due to be built over it. A workman noticed a round hole at ground level and contacted Giovanni Lilliu, who is said to have wept as the full beauty of the site was revealed.

A trapezoidal entrance at ground level contains 24 steep steps leading about 7m (23ft) down into the earth, where a round pool is still filled by trickling spring water. Twelve steps cut into the ceiling echo the 24 below, and a small round hole directly above the water lets light in from above. The well's basalt steps and curved shaft walls are so precisely carved that it's hard to believe that the site hasn't been reconstructed in modern times, yet it sits now just as it did over 3,000 years ago.

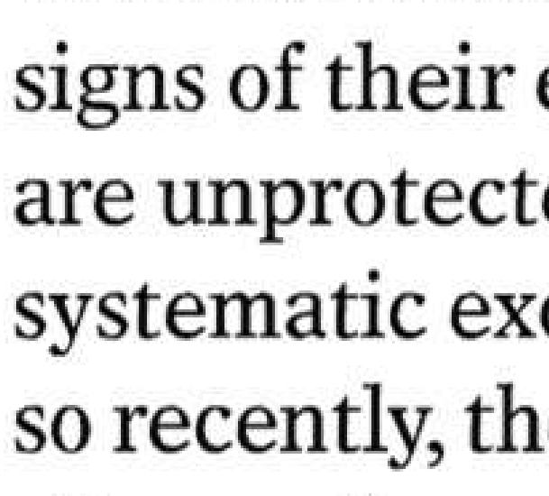
Curving around the well's surface entrance in a partial ellipse are two low walls that would once have formed a domed enclosure, entered a few metres in front of the well's steps. From above, the entire structure can be seen as representing the female genitalia, making the well a symbolic womb of the mother goddess who provided the *Nuragici* with water and life. As my host put it, this was the stairway to heaven. Santa Cristina would be amazing if it was the only Nuragic well on Sardinia, but it is only the best-preserved. There are some 30 on the island, including Su Tempiesu in the East and Sa Testa in the North East, each slightly different in character and construction, but all using the same feminine ground plan.

As if Santa Cristina wasn't spectacular enough already, it holds a heavenly secret. At the spring and autumn equinoxes, the Sun at its highest point penetrates the well, perfectly illuminating the steps and the water below. Then, every 18 years and six months, in December, the Moon sits directly over the smaller hole above the well's vertical shaft, its light reflected in the pool beneath it. These astronomical alignments provide further ammunition for those who argue that the *Nuragici* had a written language, even if no trace of it survives.

What rites or practices were conducted here we can only imagine. The remains of hundreds of huts have been found around the site, as well as statues, ceramic fragments and a trepanned skull. The site's guide suggested that the well's priests were also surgeons, and that this was a Bronze Age Lourdes, while the equinoctal alignments provide clues as to the ritualised use of the well, perhaps as a place of symbolic rebirth. Some consider the lunar alignment to be a remarkable coincidence, but even so, the sight of the Moon's light beaming down the well shaft and reflected in its waters would have been a powerful, once-in-a-short-lifetime event for most people at the time, and may have been an initiatory secret for whoever worshipped here.

The *Nuragici*, whoever they were, haunt Sardinia in life and death, birth and rebirth. It's almost impossible to visit the island without stumbling over signs of their existence, most of which are unprotected and unexplored. With systematic excavations only beginning so recently, there's no doubt that more sites on the scale of the fortress at Barumini or with the beauty of Santa Cristina remain to be found. Perhaps one day we will find examples of Nuragic writing. Unfortunately however, there's no money in Sardinia's ancient history and already some of it is under threat: the Phœnician necropolis of Tuvixeddu in Cagliari, encroached upon by luxury condominiums, is just one case in point. Sardinia has endured many invasions and housed many civilisations, but with quick cash to be made from its future and very little to be gleaned from its past, it's unclear how much of its history will survive, or how much is left to be uncovered.

A big thanks to my Sardinian hosts Massimo Spiga & Elisabetta Randaccio, and to my travelling companion Erik Davis.



MARK PILKINGTON is a longtime *FT* contributor, editor of *Strange Attractor Journal* and author of *Mirage Men* (Constable & Robinson, 2010).

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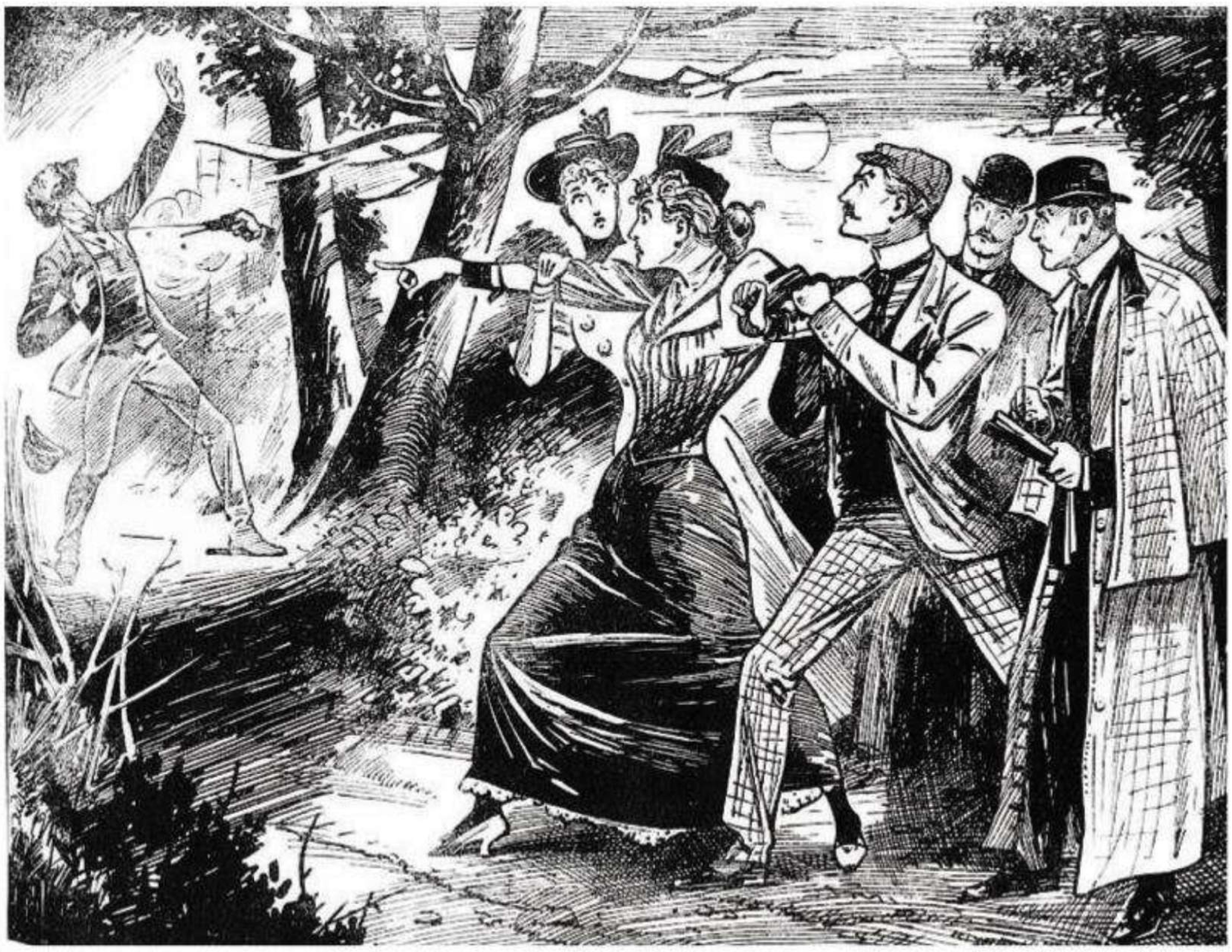

ABOVE: Illustration of a visit by police and a psychic detective to the scene of a cruel murder near Cardiff in July 1896.

5. THE FAIRWATER MYSTERY

On 10 July 1896, a pistol shot rang out in a lonely back road just outside the village of Fairwater, near Cardiff, and a loud scream was heard. A traveller saw a man hurrying away from the direction of the scream; this individual "wished him a gruff good-night". Later, the traveller saw the body of a man lying on the side of the road. He had been shot about 100 yards behind, but had not died outright, instead running in terror up the road, spouting blood as he went. Both men and women fainted at the ghastly sight.

The murdered man turned out to be 33-year-old workman David Thomas, who was married with two children, and lived in a cottage near Ely. He had never been involved in anything illegal. A few months earlier, he had been employed as a carpenter by Lord Windsor at St Fagans Castle, and seemed to like his new job. The evening Thomas was shot dead, he had gone to the local to have a few pints, and people had seen him start walking home at a brisk pace.

There were several more or less far-fetched theories about the Fairwater Mystery, as it was called. Firstly, it was suspected that one of the unsuccessful applicants for the St Fagan's position had killed him as revenge. But after it had been discovered that Thomas had actually been earning less than the recommended union wage, it was instead suspected that the carpenter's trade union had murdered him, in order to set an example in such matters.

The South Wales Police made little headway with this mysterious crime. After a while, they seem to have adopted the principle that if there are no suspects closer to home, then look for a dodgy Irishman. But although a drunken Irish sailor, and later also a dodgy Dublin shoemaker, were said to have closely resembled the description of the murderer given by the solitary witness, both of them turned out to have an alibi. The only casualty was the shoemaker's landlady, who was said to have lost her reason when the police came and arrested her lodger. The *Cardiff Evening Express* roundly criticised the police for their lack of initiative, and offered a £50 reward for the apprehension of the murderer. Not unreasonably, the newspaper demanded that Scotland Yard was called in, but this never seems to have happened.

Some journalists from the *Western Mail* instead made use of an approach not unfamiliar to aficcionados of modern American crime drama: they got hold of a psychic detective. At a Cardiff séance, a young lady medium had recently gone into a state of trance, with a strange convulsion, and hissed out "I – WILL – have – my – revenge!" When the interlocutor asked "Who are you, friend?", the spirit answered "David Thomas. I – was – shot!"

This was good enough for the journalists, particularly since the girl was young and not bad looking. They decided to bring her to the murder scene, to see what would happen. And they were not disappointed. The histrionic girl first claimed to see the murderer approaching, describing him in some detail. She then screamed and moaned in agony, reliving the murder scene, and clasping her back in intense agony, as if she had just been shot. After she had collapsed, David Thomas's spirit returned, demanding revenge, and actually naming his murderer. After reviving, the hysterical medium rushed round the murder scene, screaming "Look, look! Look at the blood!" Before the journalists were able to drag her away, she yelled "He is there!" Ask who she meant, she pointed into empty space and screamed "The ghost!"

This unedifying scene would not have been out of place in the "Cartman's Incredible Gift" episode of *South Park*. The *Western Mail* journalists wrote a full-length feature about the experiences of their psychic detective, which was of course later reproduced, with the illustration shown above, by the sensational *Illustrated Police News*. The police do not appear to have taken it seriously, which is probably good; what if one of the Cardiff detectives had been a late 19th-century equivalent of his foolish *South Park* colleague, and what if the name of one of the arrested Irishmen had matched that given by the medium?

The Fairwater Mystery is still unsolved. One might speculate that an enemy of David Thomas, perhaps enraged that he was an unemployed pauper when Thomas had found security at St Fagans, had been lying in wait for him outside the pub, but there are still no clues to the identity of the murderer.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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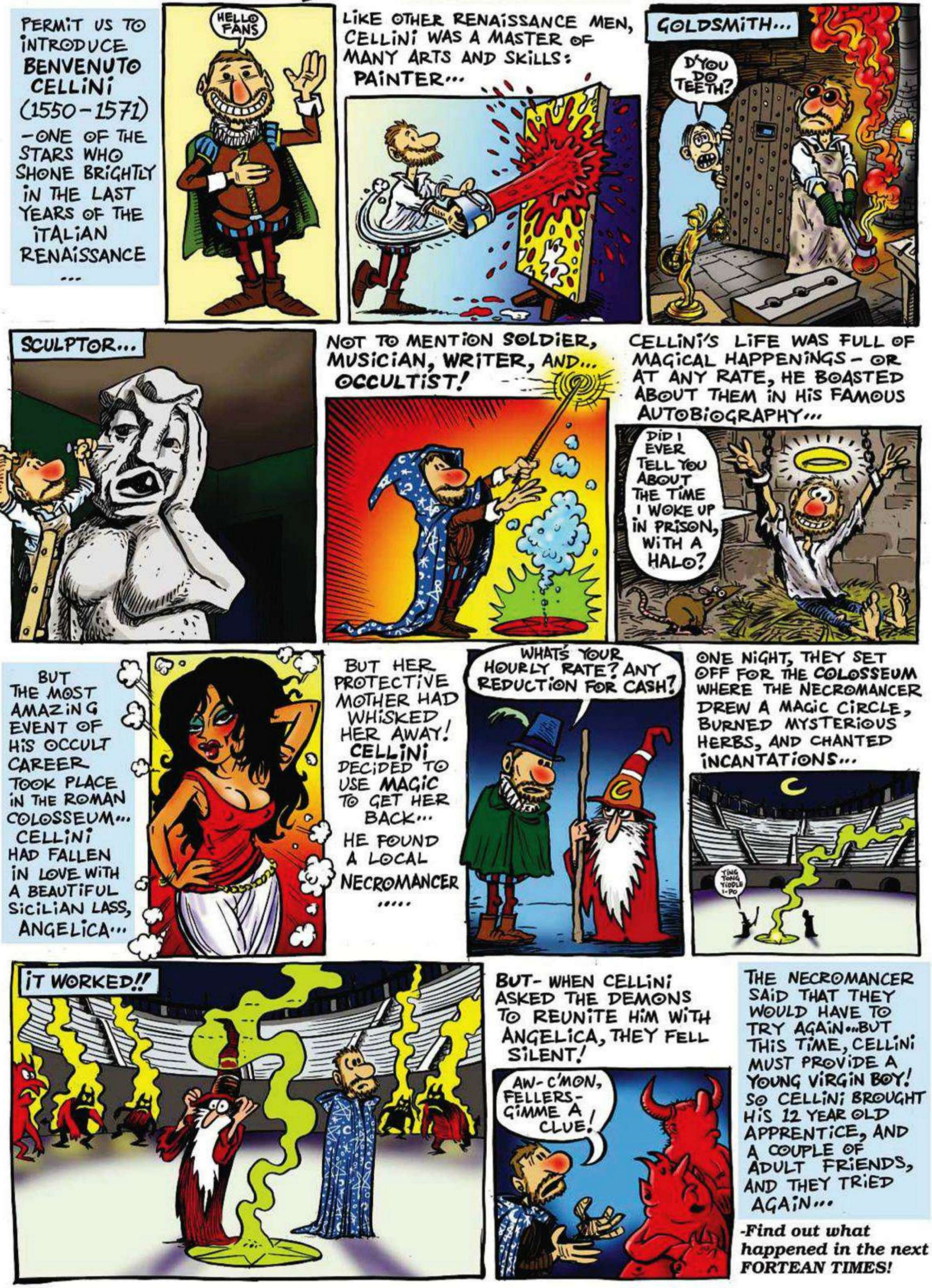
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WHAT'S YOUR HOURLY RATE? ANY REDUCTION FOR CASH?
C
ONE NIGHT, THEY SET OFF FOR THE COLOSSEUM WHERE THE NECROMANCER DREW A MAGIC CIRCLE, BURNED MYSTERIOUS HERBS, AND CHANTED INCANTATIONS...
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TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

JULY 1981

This was revolutionary month in fortean affairs. Ron Westrum and the late Marcello Truzzi, both professors of sociology at Eastern Michigan University, founded their Center for Scientific Anomalies Research (CSAR). Truzzi was invited to be a founding co-chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) in 1976, and his private journal *Explorations* was renamed *The Zetetic*, becoming CSICOP's first official journal. Truzzi championed a form of Pyrrhic agnosticism (akin to the fortean outlook) that made him increasingly question the motives and biases of the more hard-line investigators and debunkers within CSICOP. Within two years, he resigned from CSICOP – their executive committee had given his editorship a vote of no confidence. In a damning response, in 1982, he wrote: "They tend to block honest inquiry. When an experiment of the paranormal meets their requirements, they move the goal posts. Then, if the experiment is reputable, they say it's a mere anomaly."

After Truzzi's departure, CSICOP renamed their journal the *Skeptical Inquirer*, with Kendrick Frazier as editor. Truzzi carried on publishing his own journal as the *Zetetic Scholar*. Truzzi was joined by his friend and fellow sociologist Ron Westrum, also critical of CSICOP's increasingly belligerent and intolerant tone. Together they published 12 issues between 1978 and 1987. Their efforts switched to, and became absorbed by, the still extant Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE).

At around this time, there was, in the UK, an exodus from the venerable Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Branded as "modernisers" and drawing on their own investigative experience, a small group – including Hilary Evans, Manfred Cassirer, Ralph Noyes, Vernon Harrison and Hugh Pincott – declared their belief that psychical phenomena should not be studied in isolation but in relation to other areas of anomalous or paranormal subjects – such as ufology, earth mysteries, crop circles and healing methods – where they sometimes arise and which tend to be outside the SPR's remit. They formed the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP), which is still going strong. **FT36:28**

JULY 1991

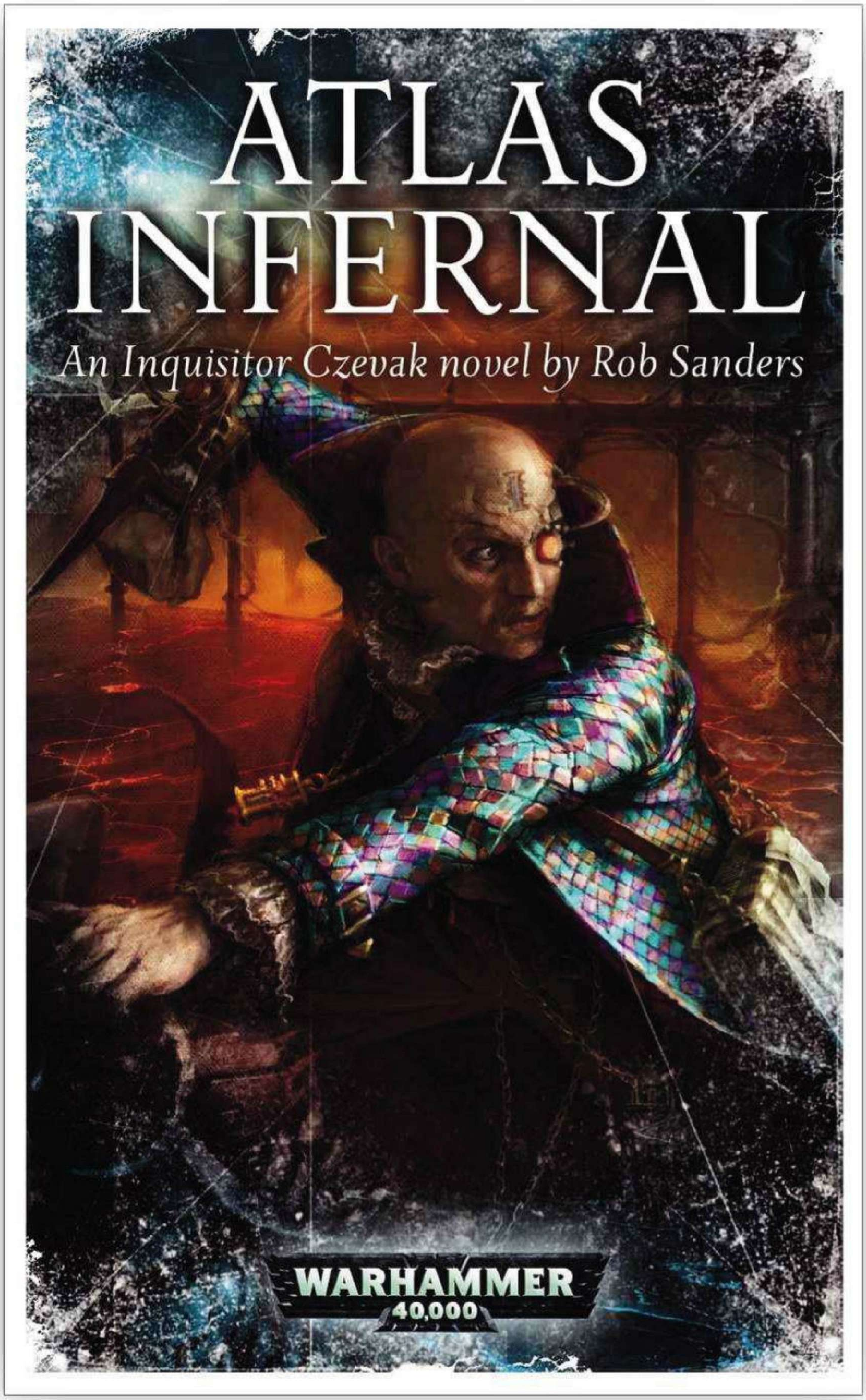
Residents of the South Australian seaside town of Victor Harbour made an unusual public complaint – a noisy party had kept them awake for days. The unusual bit was that these thoughtless party animals were just that – whales. A *ménage à trois* of Southern Right whales had taken to exhausting sex romps through the day and sleeping near the shore, whence their loud snoring could be heard throughout the town. **FT59:6**

This month, the venerable French science journal *Science et Vie* discussed an outrageous story, believable only to those with End Times anxieties. Hell had been discovered in Siberia by a Norwegian team drilling for oil. At a depth of 10 miles (16km), the drill broke into a cavern releasing noxious gasses and a demonic creature that taunted them. A lowered microphone was said to have caught the screams of a million people in agony. No worldwide repentance; no journalistic sensation – the story was flawed with obvious mistakes and quickly dropped out of sight. Praise then, *FT*'s eagle-eyed clipsters, for they are always busy. Apart from this note in **FT59:16**, we reported further variants in **FT72:43**.

JULY 2001

Imagine the Vatican's consternation at the headline: "Archbishop Marries Moonie". In May 2001, Archbishop Emanuel Milingo, 71, married a 43-year-old Korean acupuncturist and member of Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. Milingo gained notoriety in the 1970s for his voodoo-like Zambian exorcisms. He was dismissed by the papal authorities in 1980 and reinstated in 1983, but continued with his mass exorcisms until he was again removed from official duties and expunged from the *Annuario Pontifico* (the Vatican's 'Who's Who'). Around mid-month, Cardinal Ratzinger – now Pope Benedict XVI but then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, aka the Inquisition – threatened excommunication if Milingo did not renounce his wife and sever his links with the Moonies. After a private papal roasting, Milingo was again placed under 'house arrest'. His wife, Maria Sung Ryae Soon, was having none of this, threatening to go on hunger strike "to the death" in St Peter's Square, unless she was given access to her husband. It came to naught as, in early August, Milingo notified the press that he had complied with both instructions. After the *Daily Telegraph* commented that Milingo was "one of the few members of the Roman curia to have been accused of being a witch doctor," the *Church Times* responded with: "Yes, yes, but who are the others?" **FT151:8**

Everything you have been told is a lie...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